

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 521
Supporting

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

I am writing to support the the passage of SB0521, allowing graduate students to legally decide whether collective bargaining is best for them.

This right would validate two key aspects of graduate student work and experience. First, it would recognize that graduate students do valuable work, contributing to the financial well-being of the university and their fields of research, and second, it would recognize that "learning happens everywhere" (including on the job) and that while graduate students provide valuable and highly skilled labor, we are learning both formally and informally. By recognizing the reality of graduate students of today as workers, we as Marylanders can position ourselves for a future in which the leaders of tomorrow have learned to recognize the the rights workers.

I work and study in a STEM department and field, and it is well known that there are not enough US citizens and permanent residents pursuing advanced degrees in these fields compared with the current need. A major reason for this is working conditions, which Americans with STEM undergraduate degrees can avoid by instead pursuing jobs in industry. This gap is filled by international graduate students, many of whom have fewer options. This avoids addressing the problem itself and is, at best, a short term solution. All graduate student workers deserve better.

I am fortunate to do work I love together with nurturing and skilled mentors, teachers, and peers. However, loving one's work does not mean that one should not have the opportunity to collectively bargain together with other workers.

I currently work on two projects that directly impact Marylanders. One of these arose in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the contributions of graduate student workers like me to the State of Maryland, there's simply no excuse to deny the right to collectively bargain for reasonable living conditions and fair compensation for these contributions. I look forward to seeing SB0521 enable a better, brighter future for our state and our public universities.

Sincerely,

Lydia Stamato

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