

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 write today respectfully urging you to support SB 521. I am a second-year PhD student in the College of Information Studies, making around \$22,972 for 9.5 months out of the year, which is about \$1,744/month during my appointment after taxes and fees (not including around \$800 of university fees per semester). This is below the estimated annual cost of living for the region, and well below a decent and dignified living wage. That said, I make more than many of my colleagues in different departments and colleges, believe it or not, and I do not currently have dependents to support and look after, like many of us who are also parents.

There are many reasons why I support this bill. First, it has been 20 years since the 2001 legislation banning our right to collectively bargain, and many attempts have been organized since that time. The meet-and-confer process that was established in lieu of the basic democratic right of all employees in the US does not work. Issues such as unlivable wages, unregulated hours, lack of childcare, unclear job expectations, insufficient grievance procedures, workplace abuse, harassment, and exploitation, disproportionate rates of mental health issues, and the lack of other basic workplace protections and support systems still persist. The administration has not been responsive to these issues, and the way to remedy this is to grant us the legal protections and rights that other employees get.

Furthermore, the lack of livable wages, workplace stability and protections, collective bargaining rights, and graduate unionization not only affects our ability to teach, learn, and research, but it also affects the entire institution and UMD mission. It negatively affects the educational experience of undergraduates at UMD, our competitive rank with other universities who are unionized, like University of Michigan, and the ability to recruit new talent. I often get asked by prospective PhDs about stipends and unionization, and it's clear from decades of research that stronger employee rights, higher wages, collective bargaining, and GA unionization supports better teaching and research outcomes.

Stability is key for any individual and group to perform, and employment rights that provide a livable wage, accessible and equitable benefits, and legal representation and bargaining power is crucial for GAs to feel stable, supported, valued, and able to conduct their work. Especially during this time of financial and political stress, democratic and labor rights are crucial. I love this university, the work that I do, and my colleagues and professors, and I want all of us to succeed and live safe, secure, and dignified lives. As someone whose work is dedicated to social, racial, and political justice—studying social, ethical, and political dimensions of

technology innovation and society—I honestly believe that this bill is a step in the right direction. So I thank you for considering this bill, and I urge lawmakers to support this bill that would give GAs a voice in creating a dignified, equitable, and supportive workplace and living conditions for all GAs.

Sincerely,

Nate Beard
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