

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 to you today in full support of Senate Bill 0521, also known as the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act.

As a second-year Master of Public Policy student at the School of Public Policy, I am very interested in the current implications of past policy and the potential solutions we can offer, especially when their effects loom so heavily over myself and those like me.

Not only am I a proud graduate student at the University of Maryland, but I am also a proud international student from the Dominican Republic, and although the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic recession have affected us all in numerous ways, I would like to take some of your valuable time to explain how international students have fared particularly negatively throughout the past year.

First, I must express my gratitude to the University of Maryland, and its School of Public Policy in particular, for granting me the opportunity to pursue my higher education at such a prestigious institution. In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge the privilege that such an opportunity carries, knowing that thousands—if not millions—around the world can only wish to be in my shoes.

That being said, however, my current position, which I came so grateful to be in, comes with a specific set of inherent strings attached, which in times of crisis, can be particularly taxing. For example, unlike most graduate students, whether student worker or not, international students are unable to seek full-time employment, and only under certain conditions, and after an application and approval process, can we seek part-time employment outside of our academic institutions. As you know, the current recession has caused a considerable decrease in supply in the job market, making difficult for anybody seeking to support themselves, and perhaps their families, to find employment. This situation is only made worse for international students who cannot seek employment freely.

As part of the federal government's actions to alleviate the strain of the pandemic and recession on our lives, last March Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or CARES Act, a stimulus bill worth over \$2 trillion dollars. Part of the CARES Act distributed funds to institutions, like the University of Maryland, which their students could then access; students, that is, who were not international.

Additionally, the CARES Act, also provided individuals with \$1,200 in stimulus, not including many international students, especially those who came to the United States in 2020, and, therefore, had not paid taxes in 2019. The same can also be said of the second round of federal stimulus, which included \$600 for individuals.

This is not only an issue of workers' rights, but one of looking out for the most vulnerable, those without representation, without the tools available to others to conduct change, but with the same needs as everybody else.

Keeping this in mind, it is of the utmost importance for graduate student workers within the University System of Maryland, especially international students, to be represented, advocated for, and, when necessary, have the ability to bargain collectively, seeing as our options are already slim to begin with.

Therefore, this is why I urge you to support Senate Bill 0521 in order for graduate workers to be classified as workers and grant us the right, not privilege, to advocate for ourselves, including through collective bargaining.

Sincerely,

Jose M. Munne

Candidate, School of Public Policy

Teaching Assistant

440 K St. NW, Apt. 314

Washington, DC 20001

jmunne@umd.edu