

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 a second-year, second-semester master's student in Library and Information Science, with a focus on Access Services and Data Librarianship. I am also a graduate assistant in the UMD Libraries' working in User Services. I do the work of a staff member and I am lucky that my department director and supervisor feel the same; I feel valued. I support collective bargaining for this reason: I want all of the other graduate assistants to feel secure in their work position. We all have enough stress between completing coursework and work assignments, worrying about having all of that taken away with little cause should not weigh us down. There is the additional issue of equity across assistantships to ensure that graduate assistants are not overworked and are given clear expectations from the beginning. Collective bargaining is about coming together to fight for all of us at the same time.

I felt called to submit testimony because I have seen two sides of the graduate student experience: caring only for myself and being the sole support for two people. I got married this past year and my partner has not been legally allowed to work since July 2019. I have been the only person in my household with a paycheck. Because of our situation, I also have to pay for health insurance for both of us, reducing my income even further. That stress combined with immigration, coursework, and completing my unpaid field internship has made these few months difficult. I would not have been able to complete my degree without my assistantship and its meager salary keeping us barely above the poverty line. My reality exists in stark contrast against the perception of graduate students as young people, dependent on parents, living by their wits and loving it. This has not been my experience, nor the experience of anyone I have met in my program. The out of state tuition for the University of Maryland is exorbitant and the requirements for qualifying for in-state tuition are unattainable for a post-graduate population that can't be geographically bound due to an already over-saturated academic market. There is no good solution right now, just the bandage of tuition remission covering the gaping wound of the cost of living, \$1,000+ semester fees, and now required health insurance. The argument that graduate assistants should get additional work ignores several things, namely time, resources, and legality (specifically for student visa holders), and does not question why graduate assistants should have to have secondary (or tertiary) positions to make ends meet. Collective bargaining will not solve this problem immediately but is a means for graduate assistants to work together in a meaningful way without fear of retaliation from the administration.

Sincerely,  
Margaret Rose Hunt

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