

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 this letter to you to urge you to support SB 521. My name is Mireia Toda Cosi and I am a Ph.D. candidate and a student representative at University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP). Supporting the bill is taking a stance for our rights. It is asking to allow students, those who so choose, to bargain for our own wages and working conditions, a long overdue matter. The impossibility to do so, belittles our role in the university in comparison to other state employees, who already enjoy this and other rights. We, graduate students, are a vital part of the success of the university, and even its faculty. We are at the core of this symbiotic relationship that produces top-notch research. Even when our administration repeatedly attempts to ignore our concerns and needs, students never cease in their efforts.

Current wages are heavily dependent on the individual departments, which are not allowed to go below a minimum. However, said minimum is scarcely over \$20,000 per annum at UMCP for a 9.5 months appointment. For an international student, that means an after-tax monthly pay of about \$1700. From this pay, \$1631 (with an extra \$250 if you are an international student) revert back to the university in fees. This yields a negative balance at the end of the year. Personally, my year closed with a negative balance of \$2000 despite my thriftiness. This translates into a whole month of pay being taken away. Not only that, but the luckiest student finds a reasonable rent for \$700, while many pay far higher prices. The pay is in exchange for an alleged 20 weekly hours of work. On this salary, students also have to study full-time, research, and publish. If that were not enough, 20 hours can become more with the little control there is over the duties carried out by Graduate Assistants.

This situation results in many students taking up side jobs, and requiring more time to graduate. It is common to come across graduate students working 2-3 jobs; that is if they are even in the position to do so. International students are not allowed to work outside of campus, much less on top of the 20 hours a week. The meager pay and the lack of opportunities over the summer leave students forlorn, incapable of making a living wage. It is a never-ending attempt of staying afloat. This situation hinders our academic careers, also harming the university's own success. What company would benefit from distracted employees?

Being able to bargain our own wages would allow for an open dialog with the university, and for students to regain the power and respect other employees enjoy. It would improve the mental and physical well-being of our student body. Not only that, but it would yield a positive impact on the work produced at the university. In turn, it would render more benefits and save costs to the institution in the long term (e.g., reducing the need to provide counseling).

Thanks a lot for your attention and consideration. I hope that my testimony has helped provide insight into the beneficial impact of the bill upon both, the student body and the institution itself.

Sincerely,

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