

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,

Simply put, prohibiting graduate student employee's collective bargaining rights is an outdated and inequitable practice that does not reflect the values of the state of Maryland or the universities within it. Our state, and our country at large, purport to protect laborers—instituting protections for vulnerable groups (such as children), and making clear anti-discrimination practices. Furthermore, in the U.S., employees of the state must be granted certain rights, including the right to collectively bargain.

How, then, is it sensible to exclude graduate assistants from fair labor standards? My paycheck lists me as an employee. I have subsidized health insurance as an employee. I am paid as an employee. And yet, I am not protected as an employee.

This outdated practice excuses inequity by exploiting the precarious position graduate assistant employees already face: to be both student and employee of the university.

This position should not justify the prohibition of collective bargaining but should make necessary the immense need to protect an already vulnerable population. The minimum required stipend for graduate students at the University of Maryland is nearly 50% lower than the cost of living for a single adult living near College Park, Maryland. We rest at the bottom of the totem pole compared to all other Big 10 Universities.

And yet, we find ourselves at risk and unprotected by labor standards guaranteed to state employees.

The great state of Maryland values its workers, and I believe that most of our legislators want to uphold fair labor standards. If my belief is correctly placed in my representatives, the only logical next step to pass this policy guaranteeing graduate assistant employees like me collective bargaining rights.

It is high time our state policy aligns with our values of fair labor standards for graduate student employees.

Sincerely,

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