

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 to express my support for the passage of SB521, which would grant collective bargaining rights to graduate students at the University of Maryland. As a graduate assistant (GA) at the University of Maryland, College Park, I play an integral role in the continuous operation of university functions. For example, over this past academic year I have provided research assistance in a major project designed to improve the way that librarians help patrons protect their privacy when using public computers. This is a project that has far-reaching implications, and will be able to help many people in protecting their online privacy, a topic that is of the utmost importance right now. My fellow graduate students and I all work on projects that will have a serious and lasting impact on our society. Knowing the weight of this, we strive to put in the hours necessary to complete these projects on time, often needing to work more hours than we are compensated for. The compensation for our work is not even enough to pay our bills; I am lucky to have a spouse with a government job, but if I was not in this position I can say without a doubt I would not be able to afford to be a doctoral student. No single person can live off of \$20,000 a year; if one is lucky enough to find an apartment for \$1,200 per month, that leaves \$5,600 a year to live off of. Those of us that have tuition remission are still required to pay fees, so that's another thousand dollars gone. Who can live off \$4,600 per year? That money must cover food, a phone bill, utilities, books for school, and various other expenses. This is impossible.

The University of Maryland gets nearly \$600 million dollars in research funding in a given year. It is exploitative to pay graduate students less than a living wage. It is unjust to expect students to live off these stipends without recourse, not having the ability to advocate for higher wages. Without collective bargaining rights, it is nearly impossible for GAs to get what they need from the university in order to create a safe and healthy working environment. I vehemently believe that the right to unionize would create an avenue for GAAC to advocate for the needs of GAs much more effectively and successfully.

Sincerely,

S. Nisa Asgarali-Hoffman
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