

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 urge you to support SB 521 and grant graduate workers at the University of Maryland the right to collectively bargain. We are employees of the University whose labor is an integral part of its education and research ecosystem. Graduate employees are the ones doing the grading and research that allows the University to educate Maryland's next generation of leaders and to develop the next wave of innovations that will stimulate its economy. Without this labor, classes and research would grind to a halt.

Our reward is incredibly long hours, supervisors with almost total impunity in how they treat us, and an administration that misleads you about our cost of living. Currently, most graduate students are directly supervised by a tenured professor who often demands well more than 20 hours per week, up to 60 hours in many cases. The systems currently in place to handle student grievances and hold these supervisors accountable are woefully inadequate. Complaints go to a designated member of the faculty, who has every incentive to take the side of their fellow professor and who has no oversight from the student side because without collective bargaining we have no power to organize. As an example, the Graduate School claims that they recently implemented parental leave policies, but they have no mechanism to force individual supervisors to allow their students to actually take this time off.

Rather, we are left as individuals to fight against tenured professors who make 10 times our salary and who hold our careers in their hands. Collective bargaining would give weight to graduate employees' complaints and force the University to recognize our requests, unlike the current "Meet and Confer" process. The University has no obligation to contend with our demands under this framework, which has led us to the current situation.

The minimum stipend is set based on the expected "cost of attendance," which is not even reasonable based on University-subsidized services. While I already find it insulting for my pay to be based on what my employer deems the bare minimum to survive, rather than being based on the value that I provide to the University, it is further demeaning that the University-subsidized housing costs up to \$1227 a month for a one bedroom apartment, almost twice the amount the Graduate School quotes for "rent and utilities." In addition, the "health insurance" expenses that they quote are less than the cost of the University-provided health insurance premiums, and presumably do not include the costs of receiving any actual medical care.

While my stipend in the Physics department is enough to cover my normal yearly expenses, this would not be the case were I to have any sort of accident or emergency. And for many students in other departments, their stipends do not even cover their basic expenses, meaning that graduate school, even at this public institution, is only available for people with families who can support them well into their 20s. As a result, I would not be able to get a PhD in sociology or biology here and would likely need to exit my current program were anything to happen to me or a member of my family.

I am fortunate to be interested in a field with a stipend that can cover my expenses, but I want to stand up for and fight with the graduate workers everywhere at the University of Maryland, including workers in other departments, workers with families, workers here from abroad, and workers with hostile or abusive supervisors. The only way to ensure the greatest health and well-being for graduate employees, and therefore the best education and research for the state of Maryland, is to allow us to bargain collectively.

We deserve the right to collectively bargain because we are essential employees of the University. We need it because only together do graduate employees have the power to secure what we need to remain fully happy and productive.

Sincerely,

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