

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 in support of SB 521 regarding collective bargaining rights for state personnel. I am a PhD student at the University of Maryland. As a graduate assistant, I take courses and pursue my own independent research projects, while also working on research projects for my advisors to satisfy the requirements of my funding. I am also expected to attend conferences and submit my own work to conferences and journals. I supervise undergraduate research assistants, mentor an undergraduate writing an honors thesis, and support undergraduates as they apply to graduate school. The work my fellow GAs and I contribute to our labs, departments, and the university is vital to the functioning of the university. Graduate students fortunate enough to secure their own funding (thus obviating the need for a GA position) lose access to the employee health insurance, which many students (myself included) rely on to support their families.

I have been fortunate enough to have very supportive advisors. This is not the case for all students. A GA's employment supervisor is often also their academic advisor. That means that in the event of an employment dispute about the GA's work, their only recourse is to talk to their advisor, whose support is crucial to the student's advancement in the degree program and their post-graduate employment success. Escalating a dispute beyond the advisor risks damaging the advisor-student relationship, putting the grad student's success in jeopardy.

As a new parent, I have been disappointed in the university's lack of support for graduate student parents. The current parental accommodation policy provides six weeks of "reasonable and appropriate" accommodations. This is an oxymoron, as six weeks is neither reasonable nor appropriate, especially since the nature of these accommodations is left up for the student to discuss with their advisor. The university recently opened a new childcare center, but tuition for the infant classroom is almost \$2,000 per month, with no scholarships or discounts for students. That's more than 80% of what I make.

Collective bargaining would give graduate students the ability to negotiate fair wages and employment policies so that they can be more effective students, researchers, mentors, and instructors. We need to be able to advocate for university-wide policies to protect all student workers. Student parents should be eligible for parental leave that is commensurate with that afforded to staff and faculty and we need to be able to bargain collectively in order to achieve these changes.

Sincerely,

Kathleen E. Oppenheimer
Graduate Assistant, Hearing and Speech Sciences
University of Maryland, College Park
9104 Bulls Run Parkway, Bethesda, MD 20817