

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 SB521 the work of teaching and research assistants makes the University of Maryland a top institution of higher learning and ensures that students achieve positive learning outcomes. Nevertheless, we are not recognized as workers and are limited in exercising our rights. The current system is unsustainable and is driving talented teachers and scholars away from the University, particularly in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

We work far more hours than we are contractually obligated to and receive poverty-level wages in return. Many people have to moonlight in outside jobs, or overload their hours at the University to the detriment of their research to meet the high cost of living in the Baltimore-Washington Metro area. While our contracts limit our hours to 20 a week, I have personally worked 50-60 hours in certain points in the semester, between leading discussion sections for over 70 students, grading exams and papers, and responding to student inquiries. I also take on outside work whenever possible to make ends meet. These deficiencies have been exacerbated by the move to online learning, which has required us to learn new technologies and teaching strategies and keep track of a litany of students' illnesses and life complications.

Before I entered UMD, I worked in two different jobs covered by collective bargaining agreements. These are not radical documents. Rather, they establish rule of law and predictable conditions and outcomes in the workplace. Currently, at UMD we have no grievance procedure, no recourse to an HR department, no ability to take sick days, and no say in the terms of our employment. At a time when there is increasing attention on equality and safety in the workplace, it is shameful that the University of Maryland system would disregard potential issues in the workplace and allow this state of affairs to persist.

With this bill, we are asking for the same right to collectively bargain as other workers. We need to meet with the administration on equal footing to improve conditions. I urge you vote to legally recognize graduate student employees' right to choose to collectively bargain. By recognizing the voices of graduate workers, assistant-supervisor relationships, teaching performance, and research would improve to the benefit of the entire student body.

Sincerely,

Charlie Fanning
Teaching Assistant and Doctoral Candidate, History
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