

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 Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act. Last semester, I had the opportunity to serve as a teaching assistant for the first time. I am very passionate about education and I'm glad I had the opportunity to share ideas and knowledge with inquisitive students. However, this experience greatly strengthened my belief that graduate students have earned the right to collectively bargain for adequate compensation and benefits. While the work of a graduate assistant is very intellectually and emotionally rewarding, the increasing cost of living in the state of Maryland and the declining job prospects throughout academia (and the labor market as a whole) have left many students in a very vulnerable economic position. Unfortunately, a passion for education cannot pay bills. The financial benefits provided by graduate assistantships are not commensurate with the time commitment and effort that these jobs require. Therefore, graduate student should be granted the right to negotiate for compensation that is proportional to the value of our work.

It is easy to imagine – as I did before I became a teaching assistant – that graduate assistantships are simply “a part of our training” and are mutually beneficial to the student and the university. However, I've come to realize that many graduate assistants are in a position where they must actively sacrifice their academic progress to fulfill the requirements of their assistantships. It is not unusual for teaching assistants to spend hours crafting lessons, familiarizing themselves with course materials, grading assignments, and answering questions from students. In some cases, teaching assistants are effectively asked to design entire courses – picking readings, establishing assignments and grading scales, etc. It is not unusual for students to write in our anonymous course feedback surveys that they learned as much or more from a teaching assistant as they did from the professor. I say this not to denigrate professors (they delegate these teaching responsibilities in order to free up time for important research), but to emphasize the fact that the work graduate students do is essential to the functioning of the university.

Considering the significance of the work we do, I believe that graduate students should be granted the right to collectively bargain like other university and state employees. I hope you will consider my testimony and others as you deliberate on this issue. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brice Bowrey
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Teaching Assistant

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