

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 write today urging you to support SB 521, which would provide graduate students at the University of Maryland and within the rest of the University System of Maryland the right to organize and collectively bargain. My colleagues and I have no grievance procedure, no HR channels through which to work, and no recourse to address basic inequalities. We can not take sick days or to refuse requests from supervisors and administrators that could endanger our health and safety or that of our colleagues, for fear refusal would lead to punitive measures, including the loss of our funding and an early end to our studies.

This situation has been brought into stark relief during this time of global pandemic, when many of my colleagues are being asked to continue in-person teaching, data collection, and fieldwork without clear guidance and resources from the university. Although many of us have concerns about our health and safety, we must continue to perform these duties for fear of losing our positions in our programs. Many of us have had our personal research delayed by months or years due to the pandemic and some have had their basic subsistence threatened by funding cuts, but we have no channels through which to petition the university for support as grants, fellowships, and other funding sources are paused or reduced during the pandemic. We continue working with the knowledge that, despite demanding these services from us, the university will not reimburse us for medical bills or lost wages should we become ill or need to be hospitalized.

We have all chosen to pursue our graduate studies with and contribute our talents and labors to the University System of Maryland, passing over other opportunities elsewhere, and we are proud of what we provide to the State, our Universities, and our programs. We ask in return that the General Assembly of Maryland afford us the respect it has afforded many other state employees in giving us the right to organize and collectively bargain for working conditions that protect our health and safety. Again, I urge lawmakers to support SB 521, which would allow us to present concerns to the university through formal channels, giving graduate students a voice in creating equitable and supportive living conditions for all. Thank you.

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