

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,

As a faculty member in the computer science department at the University of Maryland, I interact with graduate students every day as my students, my mentees, my research assistants, my teaching assistants, my colleagues, and my friends. Without graduate student employees, I simply could not accomplish my research and teaching goals. Graduate students do much of the work that supports the hundreds of millions of dollars of external research funding the university receives each year, and much of the work that leads to the research breakthroughs and awards that the university is justifiably proud of. Graduate students also do much of the work that allows the computer science department to scale up the undergraduate curriculum to support continually increasing enrollment, even while the number of faculty available to teach classes in the department has not increased.

However, graduate students are not treated and compensated in accordance with their critical role in university life. Our best-paid graduate students in computer science receive about \$27,000 per year, which is significantly below the living wage in Prince George's County and significantly less than in many graduate programs, even those in locations where the cost of living is substantially lower than here in Maryland. In fact, it is comparable to the salary I received as a graduate student more than 10 years ago, in a much less expensive location. Empowering graduate students to negotiate for living wages -- and for compensation commensurate to their enormous contributions to the university -- is the right thing to do for the students, but it will also improve the university's ability to attract the best and brightest new students.

Salaries are not the only important issue for graduate students. Our traineeship model for PhD students has many wonderful benefits, including the ability to build close working relationships, as well as lifelong collaborations, between advisers and advisees. But it also creates structural risks of exploitation, because advisers have significant power over their students and few checks on their authority. Empowering graduate students to negotiate working conditions will add equity to that relationship and ensure that graduate students are treated as the valuable employees they are. This balance can help to ensure that a good-faith mentor-mentee relationship can thrive.

Graduate students are at the heart of the university. I strongly support their right to collectively bargain, enabling them to protect their rights and build the kind of security that can springboard long-term success. SB521 is not only the ethically correct choice, but also the practically correct choice, to maintain and increase the long-term strength of the university, and I strongly urge you to support it.

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Mazurek, PhD

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