

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 118
Supporting

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

I am writing to you today to urge you to support the Graduate Assistant Collective Bargaining Fairness Act (SB 658). Collective bargaining is critical to ensuring that graduate students are not unduly disadvantaged in their employment negotiations with the university. The current system is not sufficient: it often leaves current graduate students in a precarious and vulnerable financial position and serves as a real deterrent to prospective graduate students seeking to learn and conduct research with the University of Maryland. It also breeds frustration within the graduate student cohort, who feel that they are unable to do anything substantial to help.

Graduate students serve as the backbone of research produced by the University of Maryland. Their contribution to the university's research, teaching, and administrative output should not be understated. It is untenable that the university looks to build and sustain a system that relies on underpaid labor. I understand that the university faces a myriad of competing pressures when it comes to funding; however, graduate students' wellbeing and financial security has for too long served as the issue to be traded off. Collective bargaining would ensure that we, as graduate students, can engage with the university on these issues.

The University of Maryland and, by extension, the state of Maryland stand to benefit greatly from a more competitive graduate program. The university is pushing talented and ambitious researches away by having a minimum graduate assistant stipend that is lower than all but one flagship state university in the US relative to the cost of living. I have just started my PhD with the University of Maryland in the Department of Government and Politics. I was fortunate enough to receive the generous Flagship Fellowship. Without this scholarship I would not have been able to accept my place at the University of Maryland. The stipend is not sufficient to support living comfortably in the DC metro area, which is one of the most expensive places to live in the US. There is little to no room for students to save. Collective bargaining would provide graduate students with the ability to work with the university to ensure that graduate students can build their own safety net. This would allow students to focus on their learning and research.

Sincerely,

Harriet Jane Goers

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