

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,

When becoming a full-time graduate assistant, it is made clear that university work is supposed to be your singular focus. Our stipends are supposed to function like a normal wage so we can focus on doing the best research and teaching we can. For many students, including myself, this is impossible. My stipend is not enough to pay my rent for a one-bedroom apartment in College Park. In order for my stipend to pay rent in the area, I would have to live in apartment buildings known for cockroaches and theft. I have to work another job to support myself, creating constant stress that interferes with my ability to do my university work. Graduate assistants do work for the university, and therefore should have access to a living wage.

A living wage cannot happen without collective bargaining. Currently, graduate assistant stipends are determined by the amount of funds available to the students' department or college. This means that students doing the same amount of work in different departments get paid differently, essentially punishing students who wish to work in a less-funded area. For example, my stipend in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership is \$5000 less than the stipend for a student in the Department of Computer Science. There is no logical reason that students in some fields should be paid significantly less than students in other fields. Fixing this requires change on the university level, which therefore requires collective bargaining.

Being a graduate assistant is my job. To the people I work with, I am their employee. Legally, I should be considered an employee, too.

Sincerely,

Ryen Burris
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