

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,

Our institutions take pride in their democratic values. This is plainly evident at the University of Maryland, where heartfelt slogans are emblazoned on the sides of buses and banners all across campus. Personally, I cannot imagine how these values would conflict with the right of workers to band together and ensure that each of them is treated in accordance with their needs.

And yet--this right is explicitly withheld from us, making the case that our ideals are as valuable as the banners and stickers they're printed on.

To expand on this, while a graduate assistantship is merely a stepping stone in our careers, it is oftentimes characterized as a labor of love. But love does not pay rent, nor does it pay for food. Furthermore, the lack of formal protections generates anxiety, stress, and depression disproportionate levels in graduate students<sup>1</sup>. Simply put, an abstract satisfaction with our labor is not an acceptable substitute for the safety that collective bargaining rights would provide.

I look forward to this matter being taken seriously, and I would like to stress that it isn't one of charity--it is one of necessity. The extensive hours that we provide in highly skilled labor are critical for the functioning of millions of dollars' worth of ongoing research projects, undergraduate classes, and labs. These functions are what make academia one of many pillars our society depends on, but it would crumble without us, much like it would without other workers.

Finally, I'd like to conclude by noting that begging is not a dignified act, let alone begging for rights which other people enjoy. Even so, this is the third year in a row that I am begging for a seat at the table with my fellow workers, where we do not have to beg, but can instead collectively bargain as equals.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ter.ps/mhreport2018>: UMD 2018 Physics Mental Health Survey