

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 write to support SB 118 in the strongest possible terms. My testimony comes from both my expertise as a scholar of workforce development and from my personal experience. I am a former graduate assistant at the University of Maryland, now a faculty member. During my PhD, I worked as a teaching assistant, instructor of record, administrative assistant, and research assistant. After my PhD, I worked in a corporate research lab at Microsoft. Now, I am a faculty member in the fast-growing and highly innovative College of Information Studies, supervising both teaching and research assistants. I love this University, but it will lag behind its R1 peers in places like Berkeley, Michigan, and Washington as long as it undervalues its graduate assistants.

My graduate studies were impeded by rules that changed from work context to work context. Each supervisor had different rules for starting and stopping work. One supervisor's paperwork mistakes resulted in a late paycheck that nearly caused me to cancel my wedding. Others have had it much worse, particularly international students who cannot pursue off-campus work and, because of their visa, have no bargaining power with respect to their lab leader. That supervisor can request whatever hours or duties they want, and there is no legally-binding space for negotiation. Collective bargaining would establish a set of ground rules and a transparent, enforceable system for dispute wherein both sides are valued equally.

My commitment to graduate unionization has only strengthened as a faculty member supervising graduate assistants. I cannot teach a class or run a lab without their work, and I wish there was one set of ground rules that governed that work. Their work in teaching is undeniable: PhD students are regularly instructors of record, or TA's with their own sections. Research assistants' work may seem fuzzier, but the opposite is true. Our labs cannot run without our research assistants. My RA's are not working on their "own" research; they are working on my research, on tasks that I instruct them to complete, with deadlines I set for them. This is a supervisory relationship that only sometimes correlates with an advisory relationship (e.g., in any given semester we are often looking for RA's to just complete a task, and we will not serve on their PhD committees). Any supervisor should be a good mentor, but that is true of any work context—whether it's a lab or a restaurant or a factory.

I wish for a collectively-bargained contract to govern these relationships. In supervision, I want a set of ground rules that everyone is clear on and which can be enforced by a third party. In advising, I want my students to have recourse to legally-binding enforcement so that a mistake

from me or my peers will not hurt their careers in the long-term. Those ground rules would make my job easier and would allow me to focus on my real job: Research and teaching.

I also want a collectively-bargained contract for my graduate students because it will strengthen recruitment of their future peers. The Colleges with which mine competes for PhD students are largely unionized R1 universities: UCLA, Berkeley, U Michigan, Illinois, Cornell, and Washington. Graduate school is a significant commitment. The security that a contract offers—and the ability to bargain for matters of compensation and work duties—is a competitive advantage that those schools have and which we lack. State policy creates a work environment that prevents me from recruiting top-tier graduate students.

Finally, and precisely because many of these schools have been unionized for decades, we don't have to guess as to whether graduate unionization harms student-faculty relations. It's a well-studied question. In their classic 2013 study "Effects of Unionization on Graduate Student Employees" in the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Rogers, Eaton & Voss surveyed graduate students at four unionized and non-union R1 universities. They found that unionization has no negative effects on graduate student career outcomes or perceptions of academic freedom, and in some cases has a positive effect. Further, "unionized students were more likely than nonunionized students to report respect for differing opinions in their university" and unionized graduate students were more likely to agree that their advisors accepted them as competent professionals, that their advisors were effective in their role, and that their advisors were role models whom they wanted to model their careers on.

The facts are clear: The advising relationship is not harmed by unionization, if anything it is improved by it. Our values are clear: Graduate assistants make this university work, and they deserve a say in it. And my own position as a supervisor and advisor is clear: Graduate unionization would foster a consistent work environment that allows me to focus on my research and teaching in the present and recruit top-tier graduate students in the future. Please support our work at UMD by passing SB 118.

Sincerely,

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