

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'm writing in support of SB 118 and granting collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants in the University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, and St. Mary's College of Maryland. As an employee, student, and former graduate assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park, I can testify that graduate assistants perform work that is necessary for a functioning university, and that enjoining them to perform this work without the right to collectively bargain is exploitative.

University administrators like to say that graduate assistants are “students first,” even writing such language into the Graduate School’s assistantship policies. The “students first” approach has not served to protect graduate assistants’ welfare and ability to balance earning wages with completing degree requirements, as administrators may claim, or is it intended to. Instead, it effectively denies an entire class of workers, who are also students, the rights they should be accorded as workers.

A note about what graduate assistants do: Many teach multiple course sections of undergraduate and graduate students, including large general education and core or introductory courses. Often the first instructors and advisors students encounter at the College Park campus are graduate student workers. Graduate assistants conduct the research on which faculty members depend for their own advancement, often taking on hands-on and/or repetitive tasks that faculty members and staff will not do. Graduate student workers keep labs and studies running while faculty members devote time to pursuing grants and other external funding on which the university bases its research enterprise. Graduate assistants also fill crucial administrative roles, working as academic advisors to large numbers of fellow students, or developing and running programs at the many centers on campus – such as the LGBT Equity Center and Multicultural Student Involvement and Community Advocacy (MICA) at the Stamp Student Union. Often the first mentorship students enjoy at the College Park campus comes to them through the persons or labor of graduate student workers.

I work in the University Libraries on the College Park campus, and have previously submitted testimony to the Assembly about how graduate assistants do all of the above work and more in the Libraries. Many core library functions depend on the labor of graduate assistants. These include teaching, metadata management, user research and usability, processing archival collections, outreach, and maintaining digital systems. Graduate assistants are involved in every

program and resource with which the Libraries cultivate community and knowledge sharing. Nearly everything a librarian does here, a graduate assistant also does.

The university would collapse were graduate assistants to withhold their labor. University administrators across Maryland have long resisted collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants out of fear, using duplicitous and divisive means. It's time for the General Assembly to hold these state institutions to account. **Graduate student workers are workers.**

Sincerely,

Amy Wickner

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