

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,

Graduate research assistants should not be barred from forming a union, same as any other employees. The university views RAs as students sometimes and employees at other times, depending on what is profitable for the university.

A recent email from UMD admin was sent to faculty to thank them for their hard work during the pandemic. While faculty work to write the grants that bring in millions of dollars to UMD, RAs provide the data that is the backbone and centerpiece of these grants. UMD takes about 54% for overhead costs, but RAs are not paid livable wages for the area. Without RAs doing the science, this income source collapses. Yet, RAs are isolated in one lab with one supervisor in control of their yearly contract, their hours, and letters of recommendation vital to their career. This strict hierarchy leaves contracted RAs vulnerable to abusive working conditions, evidenced by studies finding higher rates of depression among grads compared to their peers working outside of academia. This is viewed by many as a rite of passage. I have seen this attitude firsthand when a faculty member at a general meeting told a story about how he decided to skip his toddler's birthday at the last minute in order to work more.

The strongest case for collective bargaining rights comes from UMD itself. Many UMD faculty see the inequity happening in academia. Mark Shayman, Associate Dean and ombudsman spoke to a reporter saying, "Sometimes faculty members do things and really there should be a response from the university, and there's not really a place for students to go where they feel they can be heard officially. There's something missing."

The "something missing" is collective bargaining. Please stand against inequity and unfair working conditions in academia by supporting collective bargaining.

Sincerely,

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