

Maggie McIntosh, Chair  
Mark S. Chang, Vice Chair  
Room 121 House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

HB0751  
Supporting

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriation Committee,

I am a graduate student in the University of Maryland system writing in support of collective bargaining rights for graduate student employees. I strongly encourage you to pass HB0751. The well-established right to engage in collective bargaining should not be denied to graduate students.

Graduate students working as research or teaching assistants are receiving an education, and our work in labs and on research projects is part of that training. This does not mean, however, that we do not have the right to a living wage and safe working conditions. Our ability to learn is compromised when we experience the stress of not being able to meet our basic needs. Many graduate students struggle with food insecurity and the ability to make rent.

It is inaccurate to state that graduate students are being paid a fair wage for 20 hours of work a week, or that tuition remission is a form of compensation for our work. Many graduate students work more than 20 hours a week on their research or teaching responsibilities. This is often actively encouraged by our faculty mentors, who stress the importance of high publication rates and strong student evaluations for future employment. In addition, we are not permitted to work outside of our responsibilities as graduate student employees. This means that our income from these assistantships is our only source of income. If the university intends it to serve as compensation for 20 hours of work, why not permit us to supplement this income with additional work? Or, if our stipends are intended to support us financially so that we can focus on our studies, why are they not high enough to cover our basic living expenses? Tuition remission is not an acceptable form of currency that we can put towards our rent or food.

I would, in fact, argue that our status as student employees is what makes it so important that we have the option to engage in collective bargaining. Most graduate research assistants are supervised by the same faculty who chair our dissertations and write letters of recommendation when we enter the job market. They wield tremendous power over our current and future success. This creates an environment where students feel they cannot push back against faculty for fear it will impact their ability to be successful in the future.

Our labor as graduate research assistants is instrumental to the research conducted within the University System of Maryland. The sterling reputation of these institutions as leaders in research would not exist without our efforts. We deserve the same rights as any other worker in Maryland. I ask you to support HB0751 so that if students decide collective bargaining is right for them, they are able to access it.

Sincerely,  
Lauren Pryce McCarthy, MSW, LCSW