

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,

While I appreciate the efforts that the University has taken over the years to improve the experiences of graduate assistants and other student workers, it is not nearly enough. I will not cite various income statistics, minimum income requirements for living in the DC metro area, etc. since that has been presented extensively by the multiple groups on campus organizing for improved conditions and wages. Rather, I will speak only of my experience thus far as a first-year graduate student and primarily on the issue of our salary.

I was lucky enough to receive a fellowship through my department (physics), giving me an extra ~\$10,000/yr. to bring my yearly salary to \$36,720. One of the primary reasons that I decided to come to UMD was this - or so I thought - competitive offer. Coming from Boston, I figured the cost of living was cheaper than there and UMD's offer was roughly the same as the offer I received from some Boston-area schools. However, after living here during my first semester, I have found that even with this fellowship, it is not enough.

I am not sure what goes into calculating the average cost of living, but the reality is that we graduate students pay for a lot more than just rent and food. Personally, I pay for rent, food, internet (I am fortunate enough to have my utilities like heat and water paid for by my landlord, but I know this is uncommon), my car payment, gas, car insurance, health and life insurance, books, medication, and - though this was only a problem for this year - various moving costs, such as furnishing a new apartment. Even with my higher-than-average salary as a grad student, I find that this is not enough. I have barely enough money left at the end of the month to go out with friends or my girlfriend. I have been forced to rely on some supplemental income from my parents to pay for things, which I should not have to do as a 25-year old adult with an "income." I cannot imagine with grad students with a lower income or without a safety net experience...

I know the question of the University's finances is a complicated one, but I am certain that there are costs that can be cut that can transfer money from frivolous activities to graduate workers, i.e. the people that do the majority of the research work (along with post-docs) that make UMD a top-tier university. I don't know the number for UMD, but U.S. universities tend to take a "cut" from any research grant that a professor or department receives, somewhere in the realm of 40-70%. Does UMD really need that much money for an overpriced sports program, an endless list of deans of ABC and XYZ that bring nothing to the school, and new building after new building? I am not convinced that there are no administrative costs that the University cannot cut

to improve the lives of the force that bear the brunt of the work of what this place is supposed to exist for: research and teaching. And to any objection along the lines of "that's just part of being a grad student" I say, All it takes is one top-tier university in the U.S. to provide a competitive salary and the rest will be forced to follow suit. UMD could be the one leading the charge and become a shining example of how a university can and should provide its graduate students with a healthy, living salary.

I truly hope that this message is heard. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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