

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 today respectfully urging you to support SB 118. I am a second-year PhD student at the University of Maryland, College Park, in the College of Information Studies. I'm also a student representative for the Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC). I care deeply about the success of my university and the wellbeing of all students, staff, and administrators, and so I care deeply about this bill, which would grant us GAs the democratic right to collectively bargain and have a say in our workplace.

There are many reasons why I support this bill and why I believe others should as well. First, it has been 20 years since the 2001 legislation banning our right to collectively bargain, and many attempts have been organized since that time. The meet-and-confer process that was established in lieu of collectively bargaining rights does not work. Issues such as unlivable wages, unregulated hours, lack of childcare, unclear job expectations, insufficient grievance procedures, workplace abuse, harassment, and exploitation, disproportionate rates of mental health issues, and the lack of other basic workplace protections and support systems still persist. The administration has not been responsive to these issues, falling behind other universities that treat their GAs better. The first step to remedying this is to grant us the legal protections and rights that other employees get at universities in the United States.

These issues not only affect our ability to teach, learn, and research, but it also affects the entire institution and USM mission. Lack of stability, living wages, child care, and more negatively affects the educational experience of undergraduates at UMD, as well as our competitive rank with other universities who are unionized, like University of Michigan, and the ability to recruit new talent. I often get asked by prospective PhDs about stipends and collective bargaining rights, and it's clear from decades of research that stronger employee and collective bargaining rights lead to more worker stability, health, and wellbeing, and thus better teaching and research outcomes.

Stability is key for any individual and group to perform, and right now we desperately need a legally binding democratic right to collectively bargain for that stability in order for us GAs to feel supported, valued, dignified, and be able to conduct our teaching and research to the best of our ability. As someone whose work is dedicated to social, racial, and political justice—studying social, ethical, and political dimensions of technology innovation and society—I honestly believe that this bill is a step in the right direction. So I thank you for considering this bill, and I

urge lawmakers to support this bill that would give GAs a voice in creating a dignified, equitable, and supportive workplace and living conditions for all GAs.

Sincerely,

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