

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,

My name is Theresa Menna. I am in the midst of my first year in a PhD program in the College of Computer, Mathematical, and Natural Sciences, and I am writing to implore you to support collective bargaining rights for graduate workers.

There were two things that shocked me about becoming a graduate assistant at the University of Maryland this past year. The first was my own salary. When I began to look for housing options in the College Park area, I realized very quickly that my salary of roughly \$29,500 (pre-taxes and student fees, which amount to a few thousand dollars altogether) would not be nearly enough to support single living. What it does manage to cover is the cost of surviving -- if you are willing to sacrifice some basic independence. I was a researcher at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia for three years, and a full-time teacher the year before that. I have now left the work force to pursue a PhD at 26-years-old. I believe strongly in the work I am doing at UMD, as well as the future work I will do with my education here. However, it is quite demoralizing to realize that my university does not value me the same way. Under current circumstances, I will be rationing my grocery runs and living with roommates until the age of 31.

The second thing that shocked me to my core when I learned it this year is that my salary of \$29,500 is a luxury. There are graduate assistants in other colleges at UMD that make as low as \$21,000. I have struggled to wrap my head around this number. How does it make any sense? We may be in different colleges, but we earn our salaries doing the same things -- leading classrooms, teaching, performing important research, and more. If graduate assistant salaries are meant to (at the very least) cover the cost of living in and around College Park, then how can there be such an enormous discrepancy between departments in salary? And if even the "highest" salaries barely cover the cost of living in Maryland, then what can the students on the lowest end of that spectrum be expected to do?

It is for all of these reasons and many more that I strongly, firmly support graduate students' right to collective bargaining. It will allow graduate workers to make real, tangible, positive change regarding their working conditions, and these changes could directly result in safer housing and securer access to food for thousands of workers. Regardless of student status, we are paid workers and should receive bargaining rights as such. Please do the right thing and support this bill.

Sincerely,

Theresa Menna

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