

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 am a doctoral student and graduate teaching assistant at the University of Maryland. I write to you today to request your support for collective bargaining for graduate students at UMD.

Despite significant contributions to the university, graduate students are often taken advantage of and treated unfairly in the workplace because we lack the collective power to negotiate for fair terms. As a graduate teaching assistant, I interact with up to 200 students per semester; these duties include teaching in my own classroom, holding office hours, grading homeworks, assignments, and exams, and contributing to lesson plans and testing instruments. As a senior TA, I also help manage a team of seven other teaching assistants. During this pandemic, the duties of graduate teaching assistants have expanded to include assisting professors with technology platforms (e.g. Zoom), developing online curriculums, and providing both instrumental and emotional support to our students: all responsibilities which should fall on the course instructor, who is compensated for our additional work. An education at UMD would be severely lacking without the expertise of graduate students.

Regardless of how our responsibilities increase, we are unable to negotiate an increase in pay or benefits. There have also been several occasions (experienced by myself and others) where our departments have verbally miscommunicated information about pay and benefits to graduate students, and expected us to continue our teaching responsibilities without clear terms. Teaching without written contracts means that our financial circumstances depends solely on the trust between a department and its students: a trust which has been violated several times in the past. There are no repercussions for these actions because graduate students have little to no power without a faculty member that sympathizes with them.

With the passing of collective bargaining for graduate students, the Maryland legislature has the power to change the circumstances of thousands of graduate students. This right will improve working conditions for graduate students at the University of Maryland, and show that the state does value our significant contributions to the state university system.

Sincerely,

Amanda E. Ng, MPH
PhD Student, Department of Epidemiology
Graduate Teaching Assistant

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