

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 fourth year PhD student and parent, and I am writing in support of legislation that would grant collective bargaining rights to graduate students of the University of Maryland system. University of Maryland has an exceptional record in science innovation, and I am very grateful to be part of this scientific community, but it is necessary to acknowledge that the backbone of this exceptionalism comes from the hard work of graduate researchers and teaching assistants. By being denied a seat at the table when it comes to policies impacting graduate students, the state is telling its indispensable graduate students that they are not valued.

During my time at UMD, I have made significant contributions to multiple grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which have brought millions of dollars to the university. Through this work, I also provided pilot data that enabled our lab to recently be awarded another R01. Moreover, I have spent countless hours training undergrads in neuroimaging methods, which has served to augment the education they received through their classwork. Despite my contributions to UMD's exceptionalism, my graduate stipend has remained under the NIH standard, which is meager for the cost of living in the area. Further, we have been told that if we obtain grant money from external sources, that our health and dental benefits are forfeited. Thus, something that would be a net positive not only for me as a researcher, but also for the university, becomes disincentivized. Giving collective bargaining rights to graduate students would facilitate more equitable solutions for everyone at the university.

Beyond the specific case of University of Maryland, the challenges faced by graduate student workers reflect broader societal issues that are negatively impacting the country as a whole. The pandemic has shed light on how rampant income inequality has become, and a growing number of workers in all sectors, including graduate student workers at numerous other institutions, have started organizing. In many cases, this has led to costly strikes and negotiations that have resulted in bad publicity for the institutions unwilling to provide just means to its workforce. By providing bargaining power to graduate students, the University of Maryland system could stand out as a shining example of what an equitable graduate working class can look like. This would also serve as a model for higher education in America which is suffering a "brain-drain" as a shrinking segment of the population wants to join the institutions that once led innovation globally.

On a personal note, I am step-father to two elementary school aged children who are

simultaneously in awe of the work that I do, yet negatively impacted by the financial cost that graduate school has had on our family. Things like mandatory fees due each semester slowly eat away at our ability to live comfortably. While I am not expecting pay that is commensurate with competitive industry positions, I would like the means to voice my frustrations about such policies that the administration is likely unaware of. Opening up dialogue between the policy makers and the graduate students who are impacted by these policies will only serve to improve the university overall. I truly hope that you take a proactive approach in recognizing graduate student workers as workers, and pass the collective bargaining bill.

Sincerely,

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