

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 writing to you in hopes that you will consider voting in favor of legalizing collective bargaining rights for graduate students.

Three years ago, I applied to UMD's computer science PhD program at the recommendation of two of my undergraduate professors, both of whom had completed their PhD at UMD. They spoke very highly of the faculty, students, and staff; however, they also warned me that it was challenging to live on the student stipend.

Now, when prospective PhD students or faculty candidates ask me about my experience at UMD, I understand how my undergraduate professors felt. I love the people I work with, and the work I do, but our graduate student stipends are lower than many peer institutions, especially relative to the area's cost of living. During my first year, finding housing within my budget was a significant source of stress. When I discovered issues like bugs, mold, and mice in the house where I rented a room, I was unable to find an alternative I could afford. (Thankfully my circumstances have changed -- I now have additional income on top of my stipend, and I split living costs with a partner.) That experience made it difficult for me to earnestly recommend UMD to prospective students. I spoke with one faculty candidate who was concerned that our low stipends would impact their ability to recruit students. This candidate received an offer from UMD, but they ultimately went to another university.

My experience is just one point of data in a much bigger picture, but that's exactly why collective bargaining rights are so important. Legalizing collective bargaining rights for graduate students will allow us to "connect the dots" -- bringing together graduate students, administrators, and lawmakers so we can understand the bigger picture, and how to move forward.

Sincerely,

Erica R. Blum
PhD Student, Computer Science
Research Assistant and Teaching Assistant
710 12th St S Apt 928
Arlington, VA 22202
erica.r.blum@gmail.com

