

Members of the Committee,

My name is Joshua Lucker. I am a 5th year PhD Candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. I have provided written testimony twice in the past but wish to give oral testimony for this bill. The University System of Maryland and other parties not in favor of this bill will tell you that everything is well in the University System of Maryland, and that collective bargaining is not worth the trouble. I am here **as a member of GLU, a member of the GSG, a member of GAAC** (the Meet and Confer process at the University of Maryland), and most importantly as myself, **that this is unfortunately not the case.**

All three graduate student organizations that I have mentioned have come out in support of this bill. This has not just been this past year, but they have all been in favor for a long while (many even pre-pandemic)! Over the past year, GLU has increased its union card count from around 50% support to OVER 70% support. **It is apparent that graduate students, at least at my university, WANT this bill to pass, and in many cases NEED this bill to pass!!** This bill is crucial to the proper function of graduate assistantships, especially Teaching Assistantships (TAs), as well as the mental health of ALL graduate assistants.

I joined GAAC last year in January (a bit over a year ago). I was a junior member last spring, where GAAC had around 15 or so members, including graduate students from across campus along with the Dean of the Graduate School (Dean Roth), the Provost (Provost Rice), and the Vice President of Administrative Affairs. We started with about 12 graduate students at the start of the spring semester and ended with 4 active members by the end of the spring semester. These 4 members have been trying to increase involvement while navigating the world of higher-level administration. It is important to note that only one member was NOT a new member that spring semester. We have been trying and have not given up hope on GAAC, but **with four graduate students along with Dean Roth and Provost Rice, this is not enough students to fix the concerns of thousands of graduate assistants.** It is apparent that the Meet and Confer process is unfortunately not balanced in our favor. **A union would provide an equitable place at the table for us graduate assistants.**

The story of how I got involved in all of these organizations is unfortunately a rough one. I started as a Teaching Assistant in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry my first year. **I was told that I had to grade 80 lab reports, hold 2-4 hours of office hours per week in which I had as many as 30, or even 50, people in my Zoom room. I also answered emails for students, answered discussion boards for students, and went to weekly TA meetings where we discussed how to manage 500+ students for 10 TAs, many of whom were undergraduate students and so the graduate students picked up most of the work.** There was **no clear direction** from the department or instructors, and I had **absolutely no say as to my working conditions.** I expressed **deteriorating mental health** that has persisted to this day as a result, and I was on the verge of weekly mental breakdowns. Instead of trying to work with me to see how they could help, the chemistry department **let me go unexpectedly the following year.**

I have been fortunate to find a TAs in other departments. Unfortunately, my troubles did not end there! Recently, I have had multiple issues with health insurance and HR at the university. In the Fall of 2023, **I switched from Student Health Insurance to Employee Health insurance that summer**

to start that August. At least, I thought I had and this was confirmed by the university. However, in Mid-October when I contacted the university due to issues related to this, **they said that I would not get health insurance that fall at all. BUT that I could pay full price for the Student Health insurance for that semester that would now only encompass two months!** I have had more issues related to health insurance due to switching departments every semester for my TAs, and instead of working with me, **HR has told me to never contact them about any issue** (no, I am not exaggerating). I am fortunate that the Division of Student Affairs at my university has graciously agreed to take over for all HR and employee matters for me.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, it is an unfortunate fact that the Meet and Confer Process is deteriorating at the University of Maryland. **I have not given up hope for this, and we are working with Dean Roth who has fortunately been relatively responsive in this matter!** However, the issues at the university continue to deteriorate, especially for me given my personal issues above (**none of which has been properly resolved**). I continue to face issues to this day. **I have been fortunate enough to find faculty and administration to listen to my concerns and try to help me navigate this! But the University System of Maryland now can and has all ability to ignore our concerns and important matters.** Collective bargaining rights would bring these pertinent issues directly to the administration in a collaborative setting and offer **a place for us at the table to collegiately resolve the concerns of mine and other graduate students.** Rather than being seen as lesser, we can be seen as what we are; colleagues and graduate student workers.

I hope this helps the committee understand our situation, and I submit this testimony in **STRONG FAVORABLE SUPPORT** of this bill. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out at my email: **jlucker1@umd.edu.**

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