

January 27, 2026

Chair Pamela Beidle

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

3 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony In Support of SB84 Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants

Dear Chair Pamela Beidle and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of SB84, which would give graduate students in the University System of Maryland the right to collective bargaining with their employers.

As an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park, graduate students have played a significant role in my education. They are the backbone of higher academia, and I cannot imagine my college experience without them. In classrooms with dozens of students, they are essential in effective education, as it is impossible for a single professor to give every student the support and information they need single-handedly. In research, they are responsible for almost all of the labor. On top of that, aside from the value they provide now for their institutions, they are training to become the next generation of professors who will lead academia in the future. For this reason, supporting them financially and listening to their voices is not a liability for Universities, but an investment in preserving their programs for the future.

Despite all the work that graduate students do, I have also seen firsthand the injustice they face at the hands of professors and the institutions they work for. The limited stipends they receive are predatory in and of themselves. Despite their essential role, graduate assistants are among the most economically vulnerable workers in higher education. The Economic Policy Institute reports that the median stipend for graduate assistants nationwide typically falls between \$20,000 and \$25,000 per year, often without year-round pay, while many are required to pay mandatory fees back to the very institutions that employ them. In high-cost regions, including Maryland, this places graduate workers at or near housing and food insecurity.

This is aside from the fact that the supposedly “contractually obligated” stipends are some of the first expenditures to go amidst budget cuts, which are all too prevalent in academia under the Trump administration. This is unconscionable in and of itself.

The hierarchical structure of academia prevents graduate students from being able to speak out against this injustice as well. How can we deny the students holding up academia on their shoulders the right to even negotiate for better conditions?

The fact that this right to simply express disdain with the system as it stands isn't already enshrined is itself an injustice, and one I sincerely hope you will correct by voting favorably on SB84. Most if not all of the legislature is college-educated, and has in some way benefited from the hard work of graduate students in the past. Please allow them to continue working in stability.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mohammad Abukhdeir