

January 29, 2026

Chair Pamela Beidle
Finance Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony in Support of SB84 State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Graduate Assistants

Good afternoon. My name is Riona Sheikh, and I am a student at the University of Maryland, College Park, and the Executive Vice President of UMD's Student Government Association. I am here to express my strong support for graduate students' collective bargaining rights at Morgan State University, as proposed by Senate Bill 84.

I have spoken directly with graduate students at UMD. I have heard their stories, and their experiences have been well-documented in our campus media.

Many graduate workers at UMD have not been able to afford more than one meal a day. Graduate workers rely on the campus food pantry at higher rates than undergraduate students, and many of these students are forced to work multiple jobs simply to afford rent.

According to MIT's living wage calculator, the estimated livable wage for one person in Prince George's County, where UMD is located, is \$58,643. But the stipend for a 9.5-month graduate worker is just \$28,406 at UMD. At Morgan State—and for graduate workers across Maryland and the country—the situation is not so different.

Graduate students come to universities to learn. They should not have to struggle to afford basic housing or worry about when their next meal will be. At the very least, they deserve to have a seat at the table with administrators to discuss working conditions and concerns.

Unfortunately, that has been increasingly difficult for graduate workers to achieve. I have seen firsthand how the concerns of graduate students and workers have been repeatedly dismissed by university administrators.

For these reasons, I strongly believe a state law recognizing graduate workers' collective bargaining rights must be passed. These are students, and their focus should be on learning. These are workers, and their collective bargaining rights deserve protection.

The University of Maryland SGA stands in firm support of graduate students' right to collective bargaining across the University System of Maryland. I urge you to vote in favor of Senate Bill 84.

Thank you.