

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 658
Supporting

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

I am one of the Fearless Student Employees, a coalition of hundreds of Maryland graduate workers that have been fighting to legalize collective bargaining for Maryland's graduate employees for years. I implore you to pass [HB 214/SB 658](#) and legalize collective bargaining rights for all of Maryland's higher education public employees now.

For graduate employees, collective bargaining rights are necessary for a number of reasons. First, the problems facing graduate employees have persisted across generations of graduate students, legislators, and administrators. Over the last 20 years there have been numerous attempts to legalize collective bargaining rights for graduate employees, reversing the 2001 ban. Minimum stipends have hardly increased during that time. UMCP data shows pervasiveness of issues facing graduate employees.

Second, the current meet and confer process is not working. Despite the best efforts of graduate employee leaders, university administration has been largely unresponsive to graduate employee concerns and issues--issues like unlivable wages, unregulated hours, unclear job expectations, insufficient grievance procedures, workplace abuse, harassment, and exploitation, disproportionate rates of mental health issues, and more.

Third, the University of Maryland does not stack up well against peer schools. UMCP is in the bottom-half of Big Ten and peer schools with regard to minimum graduate assistant stipends. UMCP has one of the highest discrepancies between cost-of-living and stipend amongst our peer institutions. Graduate assistants at all private institutions are already entitled to collective bargaining rights. Many public institutions in the Big 10 already enjoy collective bargaining rights, including: Rutgers University, University of Illinois, University of Michigan, University of Iowa, Michigan State, and the University of Wisconsin. Many more public university systems, like University of California and the University of Massachusetts also have unionized graduate employees. University of Maryland should be a fearless leader in higher education labor justice, but instead we have fallen behind the pack.

Next, though opponents will often suggest that collective bargaining corrupts the academic atmosphere, peer-reviewed research suggests the opposite: graduate student unionization actually improves the educational atmosphere by separating the employment relationship from the academic one.

Finally, there is broad, continuously expressed support among graduate employees. Hundreds of graduate employees, faculty, and campus groups at a number of USM institutions have advocated for the legalization of collective bargaining rights this year alone.

We implore you to legalize collective bargaining rights for all of Maryland's higher education public employees now. Maryland's higher education public employees deserve the dignity of basic employment rights and protections. They deserve the dignity of a contract.

Sincerely,

Kyle Prutt

Fearless Student Employees (FSE)
University of Maryland, College Park
fearlessstudentemployees@gmail.com