



March 5, 2019

To the Honorable Senators of the Maryland Finance Committee,

Graduate students are the lifeblood of every research university. Ask any faculty member to tell you who does the actual work of advancing knowledge in their field and they invariably say: graduate students. Yet despite their central role in the work of a university, they are consistently exploited. They deserve basic rights as workers and collective bargaining to combat this exploitation.

I am writing today to express my strongest support for HB199/SB560 and urge the Maryland Legislature and Governor to legally recognize graduate assistants as employees of the University System of Maryland.

In particular, I strongly support graduate workers rights to include:

- legal contracts
- social security benefits
- collective bargaining on employment conditions

I am joined by a broad coalition of graduate student government organizations, including the UMCP Graduate Student Government, The Diamondback Editorial Board, and the Computer Science Graduate Student Executive Council, and many others.

It is well documented that USM graduate assistants are not paid a living wage and 69% of GAs report their salary being insufficient. GAs also consistently work more than their university limit of 20 hours per week, which constitutes systematic wage theft. The Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School at UMCP, Steve Fetter, seemingly acknowledged and endorsed this widespread wage theft in his testimony to the Maryland House Appropriations Committee, saying “Doing original research and scholarship is not an easy thing, and it requires long hours, regardless of whether you have an assistantship or not.”

Fetter also made much of the unique relationship between graduate students and their faculty mentors, which is indeed a special and important relationship. But I would like to stress that the primary relationship between the university and graduate assistants is one of employer and employee, and that the mentor-mentee relationship can survive only if it is entered into in good faith and on equitable terms. It is absurd to think that recognizing the legal rights of GAs as workers would somehow compromise the relationship between faculty and graduate students. On the contrary it is *necessary* for it to work at all.

Finally, I would like to express my deep concern over another aspect of Fetter’s testimony to the Maryland House Appropriations Committee during, which he cited tuition remission toward student

income. Not only is this completely misleading: (1) tuition remission is not income, nor is it considered income for any other university employees who receive it, (2) graduate students pay tuition, which is remitted via assistantships, throughout their tenure as graduate students, even though they usually stop taking classes after the first two years of their graduate degree, and (3) Fetter cited **out-of-state** tuition figures, even though he is well aware of the fact that graduate students are charged (the significantly lower) in-state rates. Every faculty member who has written a grant application (effectively: everyone) knows this. It's one thing for the Dean of the Graduate School to argue against the rights of his constituents. It is quite another to do so in bad faith and with knowingly false testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Van Horn', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Van Horn, Assistant Professor  
Department of Computer Science & UMIACS  
University of Maryland, College Park