

[Sign the Petition Here](#)

In 2022, after a year of organizing by Virginia Tech graduate student workers and their allies, Virginia Tech's University Council called on the university to ensure graduate students are paid a living wage, including the cost of comprehensive fees. **Discrepancies between the cost of living and graduate student stipends have dire consequences.** On top of food insecurity, unstable housing, and working multiple jobs in addition to assistantships, students are struggling to pay for necessary physical and mental healthcare, support for their dependents, and sometimes are even left uncertain about the future of their graduate contract. **These stressors not only negatively impact graduate students' well-being, but also our ability to conduct the research, teaching, coursework, and outreach that drive this institution.**

Provost Cyril Clarke and Dean of the Graduate School, Aimée Surprenant, established the Graduate Student Assistantship Support Task Force in [May 2022](#). After a year of research and discussion, the task force published their recommendations in February 2023 in the [Report of the Graduate Assistantship Support Task Force](#). The report made **eight recommendations** that, collectively, would ensure Virginia Tech provides graduate students with adequate and competitive compensation:

1. Establish a formal and on-going commitment to meeting the cost of living for graduate assistants
2. Continued study of the cost of living
3. Phase in adjustments to raise minimum stipend to meet cost of living
4. Provide an immediate adjustment to a minimum step level
5. Cover comprehensive fees
6. Expand summer funding opportunities
7. Increase external funding support for graduate assistants
8. Increase support for graduate students beyond stipend increases

There has been incredible [progress](#) in just the last few years. The university has raised the minimum stipend level to [Step 14](#) (\$2,682 per month), some college deans have informally set [goals for gradual raises](#), and departments are beginning to have conversations about covering our expensive (and seemingly ever-increasing) [comprehensive fees](#). **However, Virginia Tech has still not guaranteed living wages for graduate students through a formal and ongoing commitment for stipends to meet the cost of living and match inflation.**

Unfortunately, the cost of living estimate from 2022 is already [out of date](#). According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's [Living Wage calculator](#), a single person living in the Blacksburg/Christiansburg area requires a yearly salary of \$41,775 before taxes to live comfortably. Add just one dependent, and that cost jumps to \$71,488. At the current stipend minimum, graduate students make just \$24,138 for a 9-month contract and \$32,184 for a 12-month contract. We know Virginia Tech can do better.

Out of love for this institution and our commitment to our motto, *Ut Prosim* (that I may serve), **we must demand more of our university.** While Virginians have suffered through inflation rates of [21.7% since 2021](#) (even higher than the national rise in inflation), **Virginia**

Tech has been thriving financially. The university's financial position has been strong over the last five years and is trending upwards. Just this last fiscal year, Virginia Tech [received record-breaking donations](#) from its alumni totaling around \$226.1 million. This was the fourth straight year of receiving donations of over \$200 million and the second highest total ever collected for the university. According to [publicly available information](#), the university's total net position increased 68.7% (to \$864,637,000) from fiscal year 2018-22 as total operating revenues have outpaced operating expenses. In fact, unrestricted funds rose 170.9% (to \$386,825,000) from fiscal year 2018-22, representing a remarkable surge.

Virginia Tech also continues to [rank impressively](#) among the top colleges and universities in the United States. As our president has made it one of his primary aims to keep Virginia Tech in these top rankings, it is pertinent to point out how beneficial a living wage would be in increasing the recruitment of competitive graduate students. Other top-ranking institutions have recently moved to pay their graduate students living wages after nationwide efforts by graduate workers to unionize. For example, the [University of Pennsylvania's](#) minimum stipend is \$38,000, [Duke University's](#) is \$40,000 for 12 months, [Georgetown University's](#) is \$41,420 for 12 months, and [Harvard University's](#) minimum stipends are upwards of \$45-\$50,000.

We urge the university to maintain its momentum towards a living wage for graduate students and 12-month contracts. Additionally, if comprehensive fees cannot be covered by our institution, then we must be paid enough to afford this expense. Virginia Tech's investment in its graduate students would only serve to further the [stated goals](#) of this institution and its [leadership](#).

We call on Virginia Tech to formally commit by Fall 2025 to (1) raising the minimum graduate stipend to a living wage, (2) providing 12-month contracts, and (3) ongoing evaluation and adjustment of stipends to meet the rising cost of living and match inflation rates. All graduate students deserve 12-month contracts, a stipend we can comfortably live off of, and support to pay our rising comprehensive fees.

This will take dedication and action at all levels of the university. We call on all advisors to demand and advocate for a living wage for all of their graduate assistants in their 2025-26 budgets and to be intentional in budgeting for a living wage in their future grant applications. We call on all department heads and the Office of Sponsored Programs to approve these budgets. We call on President Tim Sands, the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, Provost Cyril Clarke, Chief Operating Officer Amy Sebring, the Virginia Tech Finance department, and all college deans and other university leadership to make a living wage for every graduate worker part of their 2025-26 budget. Together, we can make Virginia Tech better for all of us. **Virginia Tech, it is time to prove that you value graduate students. Honor your commitment to affordability and accessibility by paying all graduate workers enough to live now and in years to come!**

Sincerely,

The students of the Virginia Tech Graduate Labor Union and our supporters

Signed by (as of Dec 2, 2024):

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Cameron Baller | 36. Suzzudul Islam Shuvo |
| 2. Raffae Ahmad | 37. Brian Ruether |
| 3. Oliver Shuey | 38. Ved Thakur |
| 4. Elizabeth Love | 39. Adam Masters |
| 5. Sarah Wolsiffer | 40. Malini Josiam |
| 6. Adrian Davila | 41. James Newcomer |
| 7. Adam Seigler | 42. Olivia Ryan |
| 8. Anonymous | 43. Fabiola Rosales |
| 9. Nicole DeFoor | 44. Emad Ali |
| 10. Samrakshya Bhattarai | 45. Mayar Madboly |
| 11. Allyson Herriges | 46. Nazeeya |
| 12. Rebekah Thomas | 47. Talha |
| 13. Edvin Gusinac | 48. Felicity Bilow |
| 14. Laura Bruckner | 49. Ahmed Amr Saafan |
| 15. Peyton Kim-LaTona | 50. Summer Stevens |
| 16. Andrew Chitwood | 51. Victor Lopez |
| 17. Logan Breiner | 52. Vasilije Mesarovic |
| 18. Tsung-Yen Tsou | 53. Evan Stewart |
| 19. Lindsay Sandusky | 54. Cole Gannett |
| 20. Marianne Beaulieu | 55. Gabby Patarinski |
| 21. Gwen Walker | 56. Peyton Ayers |
| 22. Kenneth Distefano | 57. Nicole |
| 23. Gwen Walker | 58. Avery Gendell |
| 24. Aileen Suarez | 59. Dhritiman Barman |
| 25. Spruha Rami | 60. Riley Hill |
| 26. Vik Velraj | 61. Hope Harvey-Marose |
| 27. Hector Montilla | 62. Damien P. Williams |
| 28. Matilda Cashman | 63. Dayna Winograd |
| 29. Brian Parker | 64. Victoria Izaac |
| 30. Leah Holmes | 65. Allison Tobar |
| 31. AJ Crowell | 66. Daniele Martino |
| 32. Theresa Libera | 67. Sehrish Altaf |
| 33. Amelie Lutz | 68. Jack R Leff |
| 34. Natilyn Mann | 69. Alice |
| 35. Doug Pluta | 70. Taylor Johnson |

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| 71. Rebecca Reed | 109. Rose Wetzel |
| 72. Hailey Murphy | 110. Andrew Gunsch |
| 73. Doyee Byun | 111. David Hinds |
| 74. Cecelia Wood | 112. Garrett Hosterman |
| 75. Fahim Bin Selim | |
| 76. Erica Shafer | |
| 77. Sammy Hong | |
| 78. Rory McKemey | |
| 79. Sam Kalmar | |
| 80. Jenna Jones | |
| 81. Sydney Jones | |
| 82. Cristian Gomez Guevara | |
| 83. Beyza Nur Guler | |
| 84. Sushant Dahal | |
| 85. Ben Burdick | |
| 86. Daniel Neira | |
| 87. Jennifer Julia Phillips | |
| 88. Bengisu Aras | |
| 89. Julia Rohde | |
| 90. Lavinia Uscatescu | |
| 91. Siyi Liu | |
| 92. Hailey Van Vorce | |
| 93. Isabela de la Rosa | |
| 94. Jessica Gass | |
| 95. Kennedy Kreidell | |
| 96. Arturia Melson-Silimon | |
| 97. Yena Cho | |
| 98. Rachel Diana | |
| 99. Eladio Tovar-Ortiz | |
| 100. Kayden Stockdale | |
| 101. Anonymous | |
| 102. Martha Ann Bell | |
| 103. Vanessa Diaz Benitez | |
| 104. Jerry Douglas Harrison Jr | |
| 105. Kurt Hoffman | |
| 106. Vansh Bansal | |
| 107. Sean Heston | |
| 108. Malini Josiam | |