

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Unfortunately, the cost of living estimate from 2022 is already [out of date](#).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
2. Raffae Ahmad
3. Oliver Shuey
4. Elizabeth Love
5. Sarah Wolsiffer
6. Adrian Davila
7. Adam Seigler
8. Anonymous
9. Nicole DeFoor
10. Samrakshya Bhattacharai
11. Allyson Herriges
12. Rebekah Thomas
13. Edvin Gusinac
14. Laura Bruckner
15. Peyton Kim-LaTona
16. Andrew Chitwood
17. Logan Breiner
18. Tsung-Yen Tsou
19. Lindsay Sandusky
20. Marianne Beaulieu
21. Gwen Walker
22. Kenneth Distefano
23. Gwen Walker
24. Aileen Suarez
25. Spruha Rami
26. Vik Velraj
27. Hector Montilla
28. Matilda Cashman
29. Brian Parker
30. Leah Holmes
31. AJ Crowell
32. Theresa Libera
33. Amelie Lutz
34. Natilyn Mann
35. Doug Pluta
36. Suzzudul Islam Shuovo
37. Brian Ruether
38. Ved Thakur
39. Adam Masters
40. Malini Josiam
41. James Newcomer
42. Olivia Ryan
43. Fabiola Rosales
44. Emad Ali
45. Mayar Madboly
46. Nazeeya
47. Talha
48. Felicity Bilow
49. Ahmed Amr Saafan
50. Summer Stevens
51. Victor Lopez
52. Vasilije Mesarovic
53. Evan Stewart
54. Cole Gannett
55. Gabby Patarinski
56. Peyton Ayers
57. Nicole
58. Avery Gendell
59. Dhritiman Barman
60. Riley Hill
61. Hope Harvey-Marose
62. Damien P. Williams
63. Dayna Winograd
64. Victoria Izaac
65. Allison Tobar
66. Daniele Martino
67. Sehrish Altaf
68. Jack R Leff
69. Alice
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	