

Testimony in Support of HB 0641

Collective Bargaining – Chancellor of the University System of Maryland – Negotiations

House Hearing, Tuesday February 25, 2020

My name is Amanda Wisniewski, and I am a Masters of Social Work Candidate at the University of Maryland Baltimore where my concentration is Community Action and Social Policy. I'm advocating for your support of House Bill 0641, as the passing of this legislation is imperative. HB0641 aims to restructure the collective bargaining process for the University of Maryland System and its employees, which is an urgently needed change.

The University System of Maryland's purview extends over twelve higher education institutions. In 2001, when collective bargaining came to higher education, these employees were organized into three categories: law enforcement, overtime eligible, and overtime ineligible or exempt employees. Collective Bargaining policy for these higher education employees, as it's been established, has resulted in an extremely convoluted bargaining process.

First, with potentially three contracts to be bargained at each of the twelve campuses, negotiations are long and drawn out. This means the process is also expensive. Not only does each campus hire outside counsel to aid in bargaining, but campus employees also have to take time from work to negotiate their work conditions.

Second, it needs to be known that these expensive and time-consuming negotiations are often moot, given the needed approval of the University System. This leaves the campus negotiators as middlemen who know that real decisions are made at the system level, therefore dividing and minimizing workers collective bargaining power.

Third, these contracts generally cover the same issues, as there is not a significant difference in the needs of employees at the same scale across the varying campuses. The current labyrinthine contracts, which are a direct result of the collective bargaining process as it stands, has created unnecessary and unfair discrepancies at campuses over minute details. Take, for instance, work boots. There is absolutely no reason why employees at Frostburg State University receive annual compensation of \$150 for required work boots, while an employee at the University of Baltimore only receives \$50.

In order to correct for these disparities, higher education bargaining should mirror the State system. In the State government, across its many bargaining units, there exists only two very similar contracts. This means that administrative staff, public safety, health, and human services employees receive similar benefits. When bargaining unit-specific items are brought up in this model, they are dealt with separately.

Consolidated negotiations are not just efficient and unambiguous—they actively work to strengthen worker power. This bill is common sense and overdue. I ask for a favorable reporting of HB 0641.