

February 14, 2023

**RE: House Bill 0275 - State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate Assistants**

**Support**

Chairman Barnes and House Appropriation Committee Members,

My name is Eric Stull, and I live in the city of Baltimore. I am an adjunct professor at Bowie State University. I support bill HB 0275 to extend collective bargaining rights to all faculty at all institutions within the University System of Maryland. We deserve this most basic right to decide for ourselves whether we want to be represented by a union, a right so fundamental that over hundreds of thousands of other public-sector workers, including community-college professors, already enjoy it. Teachers and others who work at the state's universities should never be denied such a basic right. It's a scandal that we have been denied it for so long.

The COVID pandemic laid bare the manifold absurdity of being an adjunct professor in Maryland; in the aftermath of the pandemic, things have only gotten worse. During the first two summers of the pandemic, I had to wait weeks and weeks to receive unemployment benefits and had to enlist the help of state senators to get them, which I finally did only at the end of the summer when it was time to begin preparing for the fall term; I spent an hour and a half on the phone with unemployment this morning trying to reopen a claim so that I could get benefits for the six weeks between the fall and spring semesters. Whether I will receive them is still undetermined. What ignorant people consider a cushy summer break for teachers amounts to four miserable months without pay for adjuncts, who are already so sickeningly underpaid as to receive at most half of what salaried faculty make for teaching the same courses for which students pay the same tuition and receive the same credit that those same regular-faculty colleagues receive a salary for teaching. Early in the pandemic, I had to purchase my own Zoom account to cut through the bureaucracies of public institutions, and indeed, simply to deal with the difficulty of *having to teach*, as I often have, at more than one institution at the same time to make ends meet. For the last year and a half, I have taught at two USM schools, primarily at Bowie State, where I am in my sixth consecutive semester. In most of those semesters, I have not received my first paycheck of the semester on time. In each case, this is after going months without a paycheck. I received my last paycheck for the fall semester on December 14. I am due to receive my first spring-semester check on February 22, but probably won't, because yet again, through no fault of mine, contracts were not processed on time. This is now routine; it happened last fall, too. We don't even receive the courtesy of being told our first check will be late. Thus, I probably won't be paid until March, almost three months after my last check – with four kids to provide for. At the end of last September, Gov. Hogan announced a cost-of-living adjustment for all state employees to take effect on November 1. He loudly emphasized the word **all** in his press release, of which I have a screenshot taken hours before Gov. Moore was inaugurated. In late October, high-level administrators at Bowie State acknowledged that adjunct faculty were in fact state employees,

but still denied us the COLA, saying that they could not find the \$250,000 to meet the need, this despite the fact that the university is taking in millions every year as a result of the settlement of the coalition lawsuit. The outlay to cover the COLA would go toward a small, but desperately needed, increase to hundreds of adjunct faculty; such an outlay is probably in the ballpark of the single salary paid to the university's provost. Yet still we have been denied. Five days before classes started last week, I was told my spring teaching load was being cut in half from four courses to two. These cuts come without warning and without cushion; you're simply thrown out on your ear. Instead of \$14,000, I will make \$7,000 for my fifteen weeks of work teaching a few dozen students the soft arts of reading, writing, and conversation, which do nothing important except uphold democracy. I could go on and on like this. The less surprised I am by each predatory injustice that tops the last, the more shocked I constantly am by the utter barbarism of the big picture. I could go on and in this vein for many, many pages – I could easily fill a book -- describing the nauseatingly inane institutional dysfunction and the mindless administrative arrogance that I have observed while teaching thousands of students over more than sixteen years at five public institutions in Maryland, two community colleges and three USM universities. If an intelligent being were to fall out of the sky and come to understand the way teachers are treated in public higher education in this state, one of the richest in this richest of countries, he would have no choice but to conclude that the state had decided that stupidity was cheaper than minimal decency toward public servants. I ask you, when you look around this country and this state today, does stupidity seem cheaper than common decency? If your answer to that question is yes, by what notion of cost do you operate? Is such a notion a human one?

That it is self-defeating for any system of education to mistreat its own teachers is like saying that trying to improve my appearance by cutting off my nose will cut off my purpose at the same time. Collective bargaining would give those who teach a say over the terms of our own work: it would give us more stability in our departments, more standing on the curricula that adjuncts (more than anyone else) teach, more ability to offer the robust talents which the current institutional strait-jacketing crimps, cramps, constrains, and cannibalizes. The power to negotiate the terms of our work will help us do our work better, which will help students learn more and do better. Improving the lot of people who work improves the work those people do. The health and housing insecurities, and sundry other forms of material marginality that adjunct work constantly imposes on many adjuncts, despite the daily heroics those same people perform to overcome them, are terrible for our schools of higher ed, which will eventually crumble under the weight of these atrocious inequities if something isn't done about them. It ought to be obvious that this is profoundly dangerous for democracy. Please do something about these things now while you can.

**I ask you to vote YES on HB 0275, and I strongly urge a favorable committee report.**

Respectfully,

Eric Stull