

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland House Finance Committee  
By Neel Ahuja, Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies  
HB 275  
State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate  
Assistants  
February 16, 2023**

**FAVORABLE**

To the members of the House appropriations committee,

My name is Neel Ahuja and I am a tenured professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have served as Director of Undergraduate Studies and Director of Graduate Studies in the Harriet Tubman Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. I am a scholar whose research and teaching focuses on the relationships of race and racism to environmental questions which broadly affect human health and community well-being across borders. I wish to express my support for collective bargaining rights for academic workers of all kinds, having experienced the importance of this fundamental right of association throughout my career. I was a member of my graduate student union at the University of California, where I advocated alongside many other graduate student workers for our first systemwide contract. As a young worker in my first full-time job, this advocacy was pivotal for securing basic needs, most significantly adequate health care. As a professor today, I have spoken with many graduate students, non-tenured faculty, and tenured faculty who see the lack of collective bargaining rights as a crucial missing gap in their ability to adequately work toward a just and equitable university. As one brief example: In my experience as graduate director in my unit, I note that graduate students at UMD are currently paid from a variety of sources, and students across departments have expressed frustration about not being able to receive pay on a timely and regular basis. Collective bargaining is one of the main ways that workers can advocate for simple measures that would standardize pay, ensure adequate benefits, protect against employment discrimination, and improve the ability of workers to focus on their jobs. There are many other reasons that workers need this fundamental right of association to be recognized by the state, but I hope that my brief comments give a sense of the urgency of establishing collective bargaining in order to improve the university and promote well-being among workers across the state.

Sincerely,  
Neel Ahuja