

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland House Appropriations Committee**

**By Sophie Hess**

**HB 275**

**State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate  
Assistants**

**February 14, 2023**

**FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee.

My name is Sophie Hess and I am a PhD candidate in history at the University of Maryland, where I have worked for six years. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to HB 275. The state already grants this right towards nearly every other state employee, as well as the faculty at our community colleges and the non-academic workforce at our 4 year institutions. It is clear that this right should be extended to the rest of higher education in Maryland.

During my time pursuing a doctorate in history at the University of Maryland, I have worked as a teaching assistant (TA) and research assistant (RA), and instructor of record within my department. As a TA, I managed enrollment and grading for classes of 75 students and led students' hour long discussion sections (25 students per section), as well as attended all course lectures. For these course, I graded all papers, exams, and miscellaneous assignments, and also handled attendance. I also held multiple weekly office hours, and was often my students' first point of contact for questions and problems, as well as liaison between faculty instructor and students. In some cases, I managed students concerns with little-to-no faculty oversight, particularly when working with adjunct or junior faculty who themselves struggled to keep up with overburdened teaching schedules. As an instructor of record, I designed and executed a semester-long research seminar for advanced history undergraduates, which included three-hour blocks of instruction and individual student meetings, culminating in the creation of 15-20 page research papers. The courses I taught as a TA usually related very little to my doctoral research, and thus required me to learn new information as I delivered it. I also received no pedagogical training within my department, and as a student with no prior teaching experience, had to train myself in skills like classroom management, grading, and lesson planning. As a research assistant, I worked primarily as a transcriber, retrieving and transcribing relevant nineteenth century newspapers clippings for a larger faculty project which did not relate to my own research.

I support this bill with all my heart. As a doctoral student in the humanities at an R1 institution, our department relies on graduate student workers to teach, manage, and maintain the classes which sustain the department as our major sources of enrollment (large surveys and area-requirement courses). Without TAs in particular, these courses would simply not function, as faculty would themselves be unable to handle the grading load for the multiple survey-size

courses they each semester while being required to produce research. Without the right to collectively bargain, however, we have been unable to use our valid status as workers within the university system to advocate for better working conditions. We are viewed only as students, despite the essential labor which we provide, without which our department could not function as it stands. As a former president of our history graduate student association, I served as the liaison between students and the department (a voluntary position for which I was unpaid). I advocated for the diverse struggles which our student-workers faced. What stood out to me most was that nearly all students expressed profound frustration, anxiety, and fear at the consequences of being unable to live on the wages of their stipends. I signed on at \$23,500 annually, with no payments during summer semester, and students who came before me had lower stipends than this. As many student contracts forbid outside employment, students often face the question of whether work extra jobs to make ends meet, at risk of losing their stipends. Students also struggled with issues of visa extermination, childcare, complex healthcare issues, and more, all of which our department could not meaningfully advocate for. Particularly as a graduate student advocate, I have become painfully that without the ability to collectively bargain as workers, bringing student-worker challenges to our department will usually not result in any meaningful change, even when our faculty agree with and share our issues. Departments hit walls of bureaucracy and funding gridlock, which can only be challenged through worker organizing across schools and departments. Having the ability to collectively bargain would drastically change and improve the lives of graduate workers as well as faculty and postdoctoral associates across the University of Maryland system.

Members of the committee, this state has for decades viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as the best way to enroot democracy in our workplaces and public education institutions. The right to collective bargaining has been long recognized not only as a fundamental human right, but it has also in this state been seen as the best method of ensuring that employee voices play a vital role in constructing conditions that govern our workplaces. It is a right granted to many other public higher ed institutions in the county, and indeed to many private, prestigious institutions in our own state. The reasons to exempt 4-year public institutions from this path just no longer make sense. I again therefore call for a favorable report to HB 275.

Sincerely,  
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