

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
By Michelene Wilson, Research Assistant**

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 Michelene Wilson and I am a PhD student and Graduate Assistant (Research Assistant; Editorial Assistant) at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for 2.5 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.

I currently hold a 20 hour graduate assistantship, divided into a research assistantship and an editorial assistantship of 10 hours each. Before this academic year, I also held administrative assistantship assignments that had no direct relevance for my field of study. In my research assistantship, I work with a faculty member of our department, mainly on his own research projects. Although I will be a co-author on some of the projects, my supervisor works in a sub-field that is largely unrelated to my own research. Hence, my work as a graduate research assistant will not help me advance towards the completion of my dissertation and completion of the PhD program. My duties as research assistant also include some administrative work, i.e. helping my supervisor with his preparation for the classes he is teaching. As an editorial assistant, my duties are to proofread articles, crosscheck references and citations, and various administrative tasks. The professor who is my supervisor for this position is from a different department and the topic of the journal she is a co-editor of is unrelated to my field of study. My name is not listed on the journal website or any journal publications as part of the editorial team. I, therefore, am spending around 20 hours each week (sometimes more) on work that is unrelated or only marginally unrelated to my own research and will not help me advance in my progress towards my degree.

Additionally, the stipend I receive for my work is limited to 9 months of the year (it do not receive funding over the summers) and the amount is below the cost-of-living. I have been living in sub-optimal conditions (an apartment infested with cockroaches) because I cannot afford to live in a different apartment close to campus, and I rely on public transportation because I do not own and cannot afford to have my own vehicle. As an international student, I am also not allowed to work any more than 20 hours (and on-campus only) which I already do for my assistantships. This is one of the reasons I support the above-mentioned bill that would grant collective bargaining rights to faculty and graduate students who work for the University System of Maryland. Collective bargaining is a democratic right and would help graduate assistants, like myself, negotiate better compensation for our work, as well as increase equity for students of all sorts of backgrounds, including international students and other historically underserved groups.

There are not enough rules and regulations when it comes to our assistantships, which often leads to students overworking themselves. Yet, the expectations for us are not always clear and we are afraid to speak up because of our position within the academic system. Collective bargaining would give graduate students like me a voice to fight for our democratic right of free speech and for the working conditions and compensation that we deserve.

Members of the committee, the state of Maryland has viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as a vital part of ensuring that democracy is upheld in higher education institutions and workplaces in general for decades. Several states have already written collective bargaining into their constitutions (NY, MO & HI) or are in the process of amending their constitution (IL). Collective bargaining has even been implemented at institutions in Maryland, as well (e.g. at Montgomery College). Thus, the right to collective bargaining has been long recognized, in other states as well as in Maryland, not only as a fundamental human right, but it has also been seen as the most crucial method of making employee voices heard and be a vital part of constructing equitable and fair workplace conditions. It is a right granted to many other public higher education institutions in the nation, 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 makes sense. I again therefore call for a favorable report to HB 275.