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TESTIMONY ON HB #275 POSITION: (FAVORABLE)

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

TO: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar. I am a resident of Connecticut. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 275 regarding State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate Assistants. This bill would extend collective bargaining rights to graduate assistants and faculty, including those who are tenure-track, nontenure-track and part-time, at University System of Maryland campuses, Morgan State University and St. Mary's College of Maryland.

Collective bargaining rights enable university staff to advocate for students at the bargaining table and beyond, without fear of retaliation by the employer. This gives them a protected voice to:

- Push back against skyrocketing tuition and fees;
- Advocate for relief from the overwhelming burden of student debt; and
- Fight for safer campuses.

Faculty at Maryland higher education institutions who are able to bargain collectively with their employers have negotiated for improvements in pay, benefits, workplace safety and other working conditions. For example, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, AFT-Maryland members advocated for hazard pay and proper protection for educators, nurses, and state and local government workers.ⁱ HB 275 will give University of Maryland faculty the same opportunity to join together to advocate for improvements at work.

Some of our part-time faculty work at multiple institutions and drive many hours across Maryland, all in an attempt to cobble together enough for a living wage. Collective bargaining would allow faculty to have a unified voice during negotiations between faculty and the administration to improve their pay. Research shows that unions can also reduce income inequality for women, Black and Hispanic workers, as collective bargaining allows for negotiations that represent the entire group rather than decision-making that is clouded by individual bias.ⁱⁱ

Collective bargaining can also ensure that faculty have an outlet for their concerns. Faculty can come together through their exclusive representative to gather consensus on institutional policies and procedures and lift up the collective will of the university staff. This process streamlines the administrative decision-making process too, as it requires these decisions to be made openly and transparently and strengthens the role of the faculty and graduate students who are tasked with executing the institution's mission.

Research shows that union representation is positively associated with employee satisfaction and overall well-being.ⁱⁱⁱ This is particularly important at a time when many faculty are leaving their jobs, even those with tenure.^{iv} Without faculty to teach, how can colleges and universities educate students to prepare them to face the next global challenge?

It is through collective bargaining that higher education faculty, graduate assistants and other teaching staff can negotiate for improvements in student learning conditions and staff working conditions. I urge you to support HB 275.

ⁱ AFT-Maryland, letter to Gov. Larry Hogan in response to COVID-19 pandemic, April 6, 2020, http://md.aft.org/sites/default/files/article_pdf_files/2020-04/aft-maryland_open_letter_to_governor_hogan_in_response_to_covid-19.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Celine McNicholas et al., “Why Unions Are Good for Workers—Especially in a Crisis like COVID-19: 12 Policies that Would Boost Worker Rights, Safety, and Wages,” Economic Policy Institute, August 25, 2020, <https://www.epi.org/publication/why-unions-are-good-for-workers-especially-in-a-crisis-like-covid-19-12-policies-that-would-boost-worker-rights-safety-and-wages/>; Amanda Fins, Sarah David Heydemann, and Jasmine Tucker, “Unions Are Good for Women,” National Women’s Law Center, July 2021, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Union-Factsheet-9.8.21.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Blanchflower, Alex Bryson, and Colin Green, “Trade Unions and the Well-Being of Workers,” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 60, issue 2 (June 2022): 255-277, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/bjir.12627>.

^{iv} Colleen Flaherty, “Calling It Quits,” *Inside Higher Ed*, July 5, 2022, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/07/05/professors-are-leaving-academe-during-great-resignation>.