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Written Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate Finance Committee

By Luka Arsenjuk, Associate Professor

HB 275

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

February 14, 2023

FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Luka Arsenjuk and I am an Associate Professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have been working since 2011. I am also a member of the executive committee of the UMD chapter of the Association of American University Professors. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to HB 275. Collective bargaining is a fundamental democratic right. The state already grants this right to 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 as well.

Over the past twelve years of working at UMD, College Park, I have taught on average four courses per year, performed extensive service for my department, college, and the university, and engaged in student advising and internationally recognized research and publication activity. Over this same period, I have seen the working conditions of faculty, graduate student workers, and staff deteriorate due to increasing administrative bloat and mismanagement of the university's resources.

The list of problems faced by faculty in our universities is long, but let me offer some of the most important examples:

- (1) The existing model of shared governance in our universities—faculty senate in an advisory role—is not working. Faculty have no actual mechanism to substantively engage in financial and budgetary decision-making, nor are we able to meaningfully engage in determining our working and safety conditions.

- (2) As a result of the complete and irreparable failure of shared governance, decisions that get made at our institutions typically benefit those that have the power to make them: the university administrators. The ranks of UMD administrators have increased by 42.4% from 2015 to 2019 and an additional 8.4% from 2020 to 2022. During the same period, the number of full-time faculty rose by only 3.1%, while undergraduate enrollment increased by 16%. Instead of investing in the education of our students to better prepare them for civic life and professional careers, our university systematically invest in its own managerial class—a group of people that is typically not involved in teaching and pedagogical work.
- (3) The University System of Maryland is slowly dismantling protections for academic security and freedom by decreasing the share of tenured faculty (down 6.9% at UMD-CP since 2014) and increasing the percentage of faculty in contingent, at-will forms of employment (up 19.3% at UMD-CP since 2014). Without the job security afforded by tenure, academic freedom is imperiled and universities have already begun to undermine their core task and may soon become unable to fulfill their public mission and their obligation to the state.

One could add to this list the fact that UMD (College Park) ranks second-to-last among its national peer institutions in cost of living-adjusted faculty wages and gender equity (the “gender pay gap”), and the rosy picture of the situation at our institutions that the administrators tend to present to the public shows itself to have very little to do with the reality experienced by those who actually make our universities run.

The right to collectively bargain would open the possibility for faculty and graduate student workers to meaningfully participate in the decision directing our higher education institutions and to begin reversing the troubling tendencies I have briefly sketched out above. It is by now a well-established fact that collective bargaining helps improve the quality of instruction by addressing ballooning faculty-to-student classroom ratios. Research shows that collective bargaining makes universities more effective: for instance, by increasing, student graduation rates. And it is also the case that collective bargaining would make our universities more efficient by preventing administrative bloat, making sure more state dollars go into the research and instruction that actually benefit Maryland residents. Finally, collective bargaining would not only offer faculty and graduate student workers the security and dignity that should belong to every working individual, it would also help our state’s university system to begin catching up to the top-level public university systems in this country. It is namely the case that among our national peer institutions those with collective bargaining for faculty and graduate student workers on their campuses on average significantly outrank those without collective bargaining.

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.

Yours sincerely,

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