

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
By Matthew Connell, Graduate 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 Matthew Connell and I am a graduate researcher at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for two years. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to HB 275. Workers in higher education in Maryland should be granted the same right to collective bargaining as other state employees, as well as the community college and non-academic university workforce. This bill will provide this fundamental democratic right.

In my graduate work, I have taught physics lab courses, performed laboratory research, and mentored new members of my research group. Through these experiences, I have seen how the culture of work as a UMD graduate student can be made more equitable with the right to collective bargaining. As a TA, I worked in classrooms of 20 students for up to 18 hours a week, while also grading for several hours a week and helping students by email daily. This work regularly exceeded the stipulated 20 hours put forward in the graduate assistant contract. As a graduate assistant, much of my time is spent performing cell microscopy experiments, reviewing relevant literature, and writing on my results. However, a significant proportion of my work every day goes outside of the development of my dissertation, to support the facility and research group. I perform lab chores, such as sterilizing work spaces and equipment, and ordering and stocking materials for the lab. I also mentor a first-year graduate student and an undergrad who work in the lab, which requires hours per week of planning and teaching these students how to perform independent research. I train my mentees to perform experimental procedures, and work with them on data analysis and presentation. This work is a large part of my job and does not directly contribute to my dissertation project.

I support this bill to provide the community of graduate students and academic faculty in the USM with the power to protect each other and earn the security that they deserve. Collective bargaining will allow graduate researchers to organize for greater equity in wages for the large amount of critical work we do for our universities. GA stipends are well below the cost of living in Maryland, with the UMD gap between cost of living and wages being among the highest of its peer institutions. Extending the right to bargain to UMD students allows us to bridge this disparity and make GA work more sustainable to life in Maryland. Administration currently shows little regard for students' needs; friends in my cohort have found inconsistencies in their salaries that left them underpaid by their own contracts, and they had to personally address this problem with administration to receive their actual salary. There is little accountability in the current employment system. Issues from low and inconsistent wages are exacerbated for international graduate students, who are unable to take employment outside of the university. My close friends and coworkers who are foreign students are in precarious positions and dependent on their advisors and administration to find future employment and continue with their lives in the US. If this bill is passed, our community can work to improve job protections, establish clear lines of communication between workers and advisors, and ensure the safety of all grad students' living situation.

Members of the committee, the state of Maryland has seen that the right of collective bargaining is necessary for a democratic workplace, including in public education institutions. State employees have long been given this right, along with students and faculty at community colleges and many peer public and private colleges and universities. There is no reason to withhold it from the critical academic and graduate workers at our 4-year public institutions. The fundamental right to use our voice for an equitable and secure workplace is being withheld. Therefore, I again call for a favorable report to HB 275.