

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
By Susannah Paletz, Associate Professor
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 Susannah Paletz, and I am an Associate Professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for 9 years as both a tenured professor and a professional track professor and research scientist. **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 received my doctorate in 2003 and have had a variety of positions in government, at university research centers, and now at the College of Information Studies. Through a series of fortunate events, I became a tenured associate professor in 2021 after being an untenured, professional track research professor. While tenured faculty have enviable job stability—as I personally well know—there are difficulties, inequities, and precariousness in academia at all levels. Personally, I currently teach 309 students, albeit with support from graduate teaching assistants, undergraduate teaching assistants, and graders. As our majors have become more popular and grown, so have our classes. This growth is a good thing for the financial health of our College and University, and for the training and education of our students. But, it also highlights some of the weaknesses of the system. I have an intense workload:

- I teach, which for two courses is considered by the university to take 40% of a 40-hour work week. However, this is an underestimate even for courses I have previously prepared (lectures, assignments). Teaching includes organizing, teaching, mentoring, and leading my instructional team; answering student emails (this week alone I received well over a dozen about getting off the waitlist and many about unexcused absences); preparing lectures and section activities; creating assignments and exams, relevant rubrics for grading them, and instruction/prep materials for students; grading and calibrating grading for my instructional team; and more. As an example, for each new 50-minute lecture, it typically takes me 5-8 hours to research the topic, prepare what I will say, find and assess appropriate images/figures, and create slides. Speaking with colleagues, this is typical.
- One of the essential tasks of University tenured/tenure-track, and research professional track faculty is conducting research. I lead complex multidisciplinary research projects without project management support. Also, of vital importance to people in our roles, I attempt to publish in journals, submit papers for conferences, write book chapters, and

so on. Many of these end in rejection, and unlike with how most people consider publications, journals do not pay us to publish—and some charge us fees (roughly 3-30 hours a week depending on how many projects and my other workload, and of course higher in summers/winter break).

- I apply for and write grant proposals, which typically takes 30-50 hours for a brief white paper proposal and 80-120 for a full proposal where I am to be a principal investigator, not including my co-investigators/writers' efforts.
- As with all faculty, I also do "service," which includes: mentoring colleagues and students (undergraduate and graduate), including serving on or chairing thesis and dissertation committees, speaking with students, and writing letters of recommendation; attending faculty meetings such as appointment, promotion, and tenure meetings; directing/organizing a research interest group and soliciting/organizing speakers for it; doing required training and reporting for the university; and engaging in committee work which ranges from developing curricula to evaluating other faculty, among other tasks. This work can also take from 2-20 hours a week, depending on the week.

I love my job, and my colleagues are wonderful to work with; each of these tasks individually is a joy. However, as someone who has studied, taught, and practiced organizational psychology and management, and who has worked outside of academia, the sheer number of tasks and constant task switching are overwhelming. Recently, a series of health issues striking our family, including me, has made me notice that although we have sick time, faculty do not have 'backfill' in the way other jobs do, and so can only take sick time effectively during school breaks unless incapacitated. If I were in a car accident, my similarly overworked colleagues would band together to try to take over my classes, but as I am merely limping along (metaphorically) post-surgery, then it is best if I simply continue trying to meet all my obligations in a degraded state that hurts my recovery. When my husband recently was ill at the start of the semester, I could not take time off to care for him. My schedule was flexible, but it meant 18-hour days between chores, family care, and my job while still recovering from my own health crisis. That workload does not include those tasks I was able to put aside for later or opportunities I simply lost. In any other job, I could have taken sick time effectively to care for myself and my family.

Even more concerningly, I have a specific physical vulnerability to COVID, and the university decided without conferring with the staff or faculty (via the faculty senate or not) to simply lift the mask mandate, rather than changing it depending on the current COVID rates or allowing faculty control over their individual classes. This decision prompted me to seek a reasonable accommodation (which I received) to teach online, but my doctor made it clear: if masking were mandated, I could return to in-person teaching, which I, and I suspect, my students, would prefer. While my particular College has been supportive and understanding, they are limited by what is allowed at the University level.

By being unable to collectively bargain, I and other faculty have not been able to make our voices heard when it comes to matters of public health and workload. This point is even more worrisome given that the University of Maryland College Park has national experts on public health and misinformation. The issues of workload I noted are not specific to me but are

systematic. And while I am writing about myself, I have been non-tenured for most of my career, and I have observed the toll that the current system takes not only on professional track faculty, but on graduate students and staff, as well as student learning.

Members of the committee, the right to collective bargaining has been a fundamental human right, and in this state in other domains has been seen as an excellent method for ensuring employee voices play a role in our workplaces. Enacting this bill is in line with democratic values and that of free speech. Other public higher education institutions in this country have this right. **I again therefore request a favorable report to HB 275.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.