

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Erica Blum, PhD Candidate and Graduate Assistant**

SB 247

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

February 16, 2023

FAVORABLE

Good afternoon Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Erica Blum and I am a PhD candidate and graduate assistant in the Department of Computer Science at University of Maryland College Park, where I have worked since 2018. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to SB 247. 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 have worked for 2 semesters as a teaching assistant and 7 semesters as a research assistant. University administrators have sometimes argued that research assistants should be excluded from collective bargaining because the work that we do is directly tied to our dissertation research; however, for me and many of my peers, there is much more to the job than just dissertation research. As a research assistant, I am usually working on 3-5 different research projects; only a few of these projects are part of the dissertation research needed for my PhD. My work on these projects includes identifying open research problems, developing and evaluating solutions, and writing up results for publication. In addition to research, I also do work that supports my department (supervising undergraduate research, organizing seminars, serving on department committees, recruiting prospective graduate students) and my academic community (peer reviewing for journals and conferences in my field).

In many other sectors across the state, we have seen that collective bargaining leads to better outcomes for workers and for the communities and institutions we serve. Removing the exemption for 4-year public institutions is a critical first step toward securing important rights and protections for all public higher education workers in Maryland. For these reasons, I call for a favorable report to SB 247.