

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee**

By Isabella Giovannelli

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 Isabella and I am a graduate research assistant at the University of Maryland (College Park), where I have worked for 2 years. 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.

During my first year at UMD I was a graduate teaching assistant where I taught one class in the fall and one class in the spring. I transitioned to being a graduate research assistant that summer. None of the research I conduct at this point is directly related to my thesis, (I don't have a clear thesis project at this point). Most of the research I have done has been done in order to either maintain research funding for my lab or train myself in necessary lab skills. The work I do in this assistantship is different from my work towards my degree since the assistantship often requires me to do side projects that are separate from any dissertation research (these side projects sometimes take whole semesters). The results of these large side projects are used to maintain funding for the lab and aren't directly applicable to any thesis projects.

From my experience, a lot of professors don't see PhD programs as apprenticeships, but rather as a means of getting cheap labor. Professors typically expect their graduate students to work 40+ hours a week on research while we are only paid for part time work. It is very difficult to find a professor that is actually invested in mentoring their graduate students. The expectation in most research groups is that you, as a graduate student, are already ready for the labor force and are here to just be exploited. I've seen fellow graduate students get fired from labs for simply not knowing everything and not producing enough "publishable" results within their first semester of joining a lab. This bill is important to me because I think we have a right to have more of a means of protecting ourselves from abuse and exploitation. More often than not, we are treated as workers not as students, but are not granted those same rights/protections.

Members of the committee, this state has for decades viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as an effective means of enforcing 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 are heard and acted on. It is a right granted to many other public higher education 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 only serves to further make graduate assistants vulnerable to exploitation. I again therefore call for a favorable report to SB 247.