

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Timothy Kumfer, Graduate Assistant
SB 247**

**State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty, Part-Time Faculty,
and Graduate Assistants
February 16, 2023**

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Finance Committee,

This issue matters to me personally because strong working conditions for teachers have been shown consistently to be the foundation for successful student learning outcomes. The basis for strong working conditions, in turn, is the right to collective bargaining—a democratic right which has been denied to faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate assistants within the University System of Maryland and related educational institutions within the state for far too long. This session of the General Assembly provides an unparalleled opportunity to rectify this wrong and I urge your Committee to begin taking the necessary steps to do so immediately.

Graduate assistants are the backbone of the research university, performing a significant amount of the instructional and administrative work that enables tenured and tenure track faculty to dedicate themselves to producing original research. The University of Maryland - College Park is no exception to this rule, with graduate assistants often working far in excess of the contract-stipulated 20 hours per week. In many departments, mine included, we are often sole instructors of record, teaching undergraduate courses in lieu of professors. The process of receiving these teaching assignments, including not only which courses one is assigned but also the times at which instruction is offered, lacks transparency. Further, graduate assistants typically receive little oversight, direction, or support when providing undergraduate instruction. The meet-and-confer process in place since 2010 has done little to substantively address these issues, which are long-term, systemic in nature, and widely experienced across departments.

Despite residing in one of the most expensive metropolitan regions in the country, the stipends for UMD graduate assistants remain among the lowest in the Big Ten. With an annualized salary stipend of \$22,000.34 for the academic year 2021-2022, I, like many others, have had to take on additional outside employment to cover my living expenses without incurring tens of thousands in dollars in student debt. The need to juggle multiple jobs at once inevitably affects the quality of instruction graduate assistants are able to provide to undergraduates while also pushing back their own time to degree. UMD, like other universities, touts its commitment to creating a diverse pipeline of scholars that better represents current student populations and can meet the needs of an increasingly multicultural society. Abysmally low stipends inhibit this stated goal, reproducing the assumption that the academy is an occupation reserved for the privileged few.

The challenges facing higher education in Maryland and throughout the country are immense. Collective bargaining for faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate assistants will not solve all of these problems. It is, however, a critical step in the path towards their resolution?one which you have the power to make happen. I urge you to do so now by working to ensure the swift passage of SB247/HB275.

Sincerely,
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