

SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 247

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

FINANCE COMMITTEE

February 16, 2023

Thank you, Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Finance Committee, for your serious consideration of SB247, which would extend collective bargaining rights to faculty and graduate assistants at institutions within the University of System of Maryland (USM), Morgan State University, and St. Mary's College of Maryland. My name is Adam Schneider, and as a former adjunct faculty member within the USM, and in solidarity with and **in support of adjunct faculty and graduate assistants, whose work is essential to the core teaching and research functions of our public universities, I offer this testimony in strong support of SB247.**

SB247 responds to changes in the workforce and higher education, which increasingly rely on so-called “contingent” workers. Such workers make up a larger and larger percentage of the U.S. economy. In the years following the Great Recession the U.S. Government Accountability Office [GOA] estimated that 40% of the U.S. workforce was contingent.¹ A significant – and often overlooked – sector that has seen a dramatic increase in the size of its contingent workforce is academia. “In 1969, almost 80 percent of college faculty members were tenured or tenure-track. Today, the numbers have essentially flipped, with two-thirds of faculty now non-tenured and half of those working only part-time, often with several different teaching jobs.”² In fact, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics finds that almost one-third of contingent workers are within education and health services industry.³ According to the GAO, “These contingent workers are also more likely than standard workers to experience job instability, and to be less satisfied with their benefits and employment arrangements than standard full-time workers. Because contingent work can be unstable or may afford fewer worker protections depending on a worker’s particular employment arrangement, it tends to lead to lower earnings, fewer benefits, and a greater reliance on public assistance than standard work.”⁴

Many adjunct faculty members struggle to make ends meet. The American Community Survey found that nearly one-third of part-time faculty live near or below the federal poverty line, and the UC Berkeley Labor Center found that a quarter of families of part-time faculty are enrolled in at least one public assistance program like food stamps and Medicaid, or qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit.⁵ The Chronicle of Higher Education found “a large portion of universities and

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (April 20, 2015). Contingent workforce: size, characteristics, earnings, and benefits. Available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/670/669899.pdf>.

² Frederickson, C. (Sept 15, 2015). There is no excuse for how universities treat adjuncts. *The Atlantic*. Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/09/higher-education-college-adjunct-professor-salary/404461/>.

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (May 2017). Industry of contingent and noncontingent workers, percentage distribution. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2018/contingent-workers/home.htm>.

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (April 20, 2015).

⁵ Frederickson, C. (Sept 15, 2015).

colleges limit their adjuncts' hours to avoid having to provide health insurance now required for full-timers under the Affordable Care Act.”⁶

SB247 is a response to the failures of current policies and procedures. In their previous statements on this issue, university administrators have praised the “meet and confer” process, which is available to graduate assistants – but not to adjunct faculty. While this process may meet the goals of university leadership, the evidence that it has failed to meet the needs of many graduate assistants is clear, for nearly 200 graduate assistants submitted testimony seeking the right to collectively bargain last year. If graduate students and adjunct faculty members feel that their needs are being heard and met by university leaders, there would be little reason for them to organize to actualize their right to collectively bargain. **SB247 not only provides graduate assistants and adjunct faculty the ability to sit across the table and speak with university administrators; it will encourage these administrators to listen and respond to their needs.**

SB247 advances a vision of our public universities as a system that “fully embraces diversity, equity and inclusion as morally right and educationally sound, and that centers the wellbeing of individuals and communities” – which is entirely consistent with, and in fact is identical to, the stated vision of the University of Maryland.⁷ Opposition by the USM and its institutions is inconsistent with the visions and culture to which they are ostensibly dedicated. The USM proclaims that it and “its institutions are dedicated to celebrating, supporting, upholding, protecting, and enhancing diversity and inclusion ... [and will] evaluate whether we treat our own people right, fairly, with equitable opportunity.”⁸ SB247 will diversify voices that are heard, and will help ensure that graduate students and adjunct faculty are treated fairly and equitably. Towson University states it “is a national leader in inclusive excellence.”⁹ SB247 will help ensure that graduate assistants and adjunct faculty at Towson University and other USM institutions are included in the decisions that impact them. Leadership on campuses across the USM rightly have encouraged and supported the creation of spaces where people can come together around certain aspects of their social identities to share their experiences and needs. **It's regretful if the USM or its institutions oppose people coming together around their experiences and needs as workers.**

With SB247, USM and its institutions will join many other universities both locally and nationally to extend collective bargaining rights – including at the University of Michigan, the University of Illinois, and the University of California. The University of Wisconsin, my alma mater, has had collective bargaining rights for graduate assistants for decades. The protections and voice that such rights provide only strengthen the university's teaching, research, and community.

I strongly urge a favorable vote on SB247, and greatly appreciate your time and consideration.

Adam Schneider (adamfschneider@gmail.com)

⁶ Dunn, S. (Apr 22, 2013). Colleges are slashing adjuncts' hours to skirt new rules on health-insurance eligibility. Chronicle of Higher Education. Available at <https://www.chronicle.com/article/colleges-are-slashing-adjuncts-hours-to-skirt-new-rules-on-health-insurance-eligibility/>.

⁷ University of Maryland. (February 10, 2023). Office of diversity and inclusion. <https://diversity.umd.edu/>. (The University of Maryland Graduate School opposed similar legislation last year.)

⁸ University System of Maryland. (February 10, 2023). Toward racial equity and justice. <https://www.usmd.edu/usm/workgroups/diversity/>. (The University of Maryland Graduate School opposed similar legislation last year.)

⁹ Towson University. (February 10, 2023). Towson university. <https://www.towson.edu/>. (The University of Maryland Graduate School opposed similar legislation last year.)