

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

By Leo Bauer

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 Leo Bauer and I am a graduate assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for one and a half 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.

Currently, I am a graduate research assistant gathering data for an NSF grant, even though my assignment can change to teaching every semester anew. I roughly work the 20 hours a week I am getting paid for, but I also see that most of my peers with a teaching assignment have to work more than that. Even though my work is interesting and I learn from it, it is not related to my own research and dissertation work. I code events for an observational data set, which in practice means that I sift through thousands of newspaper articles and find political events relevant for our data set project. In addition, I develop new methodologies of how to speed up and simplify this work as well as coordinating other graduate research assistants' work on the project. Hence, my 20-hour assignment is spent without directly contributing to my degree, as the data we gather is intended for the grant-funded project. The assistantship can still be useful for my future academic career as it offers co-authorship opportunities and the development of other skills, but no direct contribution to my dissertation work. Which is totally fine, but that is why we as graduate workers need to unionize.

First, as a principle I think that every worker should have the right to unionize. In my home country, Germany, many workers across economic sectors are unionized and collective bargaining is seen as a natural aspect in the employer-employee relationship. Second, I would personally benefit from unionization as a graduate assistant as it would enable us graduate assistants to fight for higher wages that actually ensure our economic survival. My stipend is below what I need to cover my cost of living. As an almost 30-year old, neither can I live alone, nor pay for flights to Europe to see my family without touching my pre-graduate school savings. In addition, as an international student I cannot work off-campus and thus don't have the possibility of improving my economic situation myself.

Members of the committee, 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 play a vital role in constructing conditions that govern our workplaces. It is a right granted to many other public higher education institutions in the county, and research shows that these institutions have not been disadvantaged by giving their graduate workers the right to collective bargaining. The reasons to exempt 4-year public institutions from this path just no longer make sense. I therefore call for a favorable report to SB 247.