

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

**By Lilah, 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,

"Dear Chair [TBA], Vice Chair [TBA], and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Lilah Drafts-Johnson and I am a member of the University of Maryland College Park community. I am writing to express my strong support for SB247/HB275 (State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate Assistants), granting collective bargaining rights to faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate assistants at an institution within the University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, or St. Mary's College of Maryland.

I am a graduate assistant pursuing my MA at UMD and am currently considering whether or not to stay to do my PhD there. I want to stay at UMD because I love my program and the people in it, however, UMD's stipend rate for graduate workers is severely disproportionate to the actual cost of living in the area. I was offered a Flagship Fellowship to stay to do my PhD, which is the most competitive recruitment offer UMD can offer a prospective student and adds additional funding to the base stipend that my department gives graduate workers. Even with the highest award that UMD can give to a graduate worker, my salary will not meet the cost of living in College Park. The Dean of the Graduate School, in my notification letter, wrote that if the university managed to successfully recruit all of its Flagship honorees, the results would be "transformational for our institution." I counter that what would really be transformational for the institution would be for it to support ALL of its workers and give us our fundamental right to collectively bargain.

What a lot of people don't realize is that something like low pay or lack of worker protections isn't just a labor issue, it's a gender equity issue. Academia generally has a lot of steep power dynamics between graduate students just starting out and professors well-established in their fields and careers. My research at UMD focuses on preventing gender-based violence—things like sexual harassment and misconduct—in sport communities. As an advocate, I know that it's very dangerous to mix financial and job insecurity into a context where power differentials are already at play. That's how people get trapped in situations they aren't sure how to navigate and are unable to access the resources they need to get help.

Last fall, two of the students I taught in a core Kinesiology undergraduate course reached out to me and asked if I would participate in an interview for a speech and debate class in which they were enrolled. I agreed and was surprised when they asked me questions about the number of hours I worked and how much the university paid me. It turns out they were arguing for graduate workers to have the right to collectively bargain. Hopefully, this committee as

well as the university will see what my freshman undergraduate students do, that investing in the agency of educators at Maryland's public university system is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.

Respectfully,  
Lilah Drafts-Johnson

Sincerely,  
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