

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

By [Ellia Khan, M.A.]

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 Ellia Khan, and I am a Teaching Assistant at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), where I have been working since August 2021. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to SB 247. The state 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 one and a half years at UMBC, I have been a Teaching Assistant for eight different courses. The number of students for these classes have ranged from 30 to 60. My responsibilities as a Teaching Assistant do not relate to my work towards my degree, particularly since I have had to assist on courses that are not relevant to my field of interest. The 20 hours I am required to work every week involves grading assignments, holding weekly office hours, addressing students' queries over emails, maintaining attendance records, designing rubrics for grading, providing exam review sessions, and proctoring exams, among many other responsibilities. I have also been required to turn over grades for multiple assignments with detailed feedback within 12 hours twice a week for an entire semester. These duties interfere with my ability to focus on my research work and hinder my ability to progress in the program in a timely manner.

Since I am an international student, I am only allowed to work for 20 hours every week. I am also on a nine-month contract, so I do not have funding for three months of the year. I am also not allowed any time off. Additionally, I am not allowed to work off campus. I am also not eligible to apply for any research grants or fellowships since I am not a U.S. citizen. This puts me and other students like me in a very precarious position. The compensation I receive as a Teaching Assistant is not livable or reflective of the services I provide to the university. As a result, I am constantly worried about meeting my basic needs, and unable to participate in several different career opportunities because of financial constraints. For example, I give up on opportunities to present at conferences, which are a requirement for my degree, because I cannot afford to travel.

Academic institutions should be inclusive spaces that set examples for the larger society to continue to do better. Unfortunately, by withholding graduate students' right to collectively bargain, we are withholding access to numerous resources and telling students that only those with power and privilege can progress in academia. I support this bill because I want a livable wage and so that I can progress in my degree.

Members of the committee, this state has for decades viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as the best way to enroot 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 play a vital role in constructing conditions that govern our workplaces. It is a right granted to many other public higher ed 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 just no longer make sense. I again therefore call for a favorable report to SB 247.