

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

By Jesse Lee Brooks

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 Jesse Brooks, and I am a lecturer at the University of Maryland, where I have worked for seven years teaching fiction, a course on writing about the environment, and a variety of others. 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. This right should also be extended to the rest of higher education in Maryland.

I teach four courses each semester, with about twenty students in each class. This is twice as many courses than most tenured faculty. And many, sometimes the majority of the courses I teach are outside of my field of expertise. This of course increases the amount of work required to make a syllabus, lesson plan, and grade in an analytical manner. With a course load double that of the average tenured professor, this of course compounds with the extra work required to teach these classes. The best opportunity to achieve a tenured post is to publish, but this is exceedingly difficult to multitask alongside the semester's excessive work. I also teach during the summer break to afford my rent.

I live in a rent-controlled community and still have difficulty paying my rent each month, so it is not possible for me to cut back on my course load to help me advance in my teaching career by focusing more on publishing. Currently, I cannot contribute to retirement; and I will never be able to afford a home. I was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder four years ago, so I also need to maintain an adequate number of courses to secure my healthcare and to afford aspects that are not covered by my insurance, like my therapist who just changed to out-of-network. Each semester I struggle to handle the workload placed upon me in the time restraints enforced by many of the program directors. Their highest priority is to assess the students as quickly as possible, which can be difficult when you are trying to provide thorough feedback for eighty ten-page essays. The anxiety I have over possibly losing my job for failing to meet these restraints often exacerbates symptoms like depression. Being provided a more livable wage

alongside greater job security would help to not just provided long-term security, but my day-to-day security as well.

Again, I'm calling for a favorable report to SB 247. Members of the committee, collective bargaining is a fundamental human right that is 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 does not make sense, and I ask that you please consider making this change. I can assure you that my situation is not dissimilar from many of my collogues. I hear these stories from other co-workers every day. We did not choose these careers based on money, but to mentor and educate the public, and we cannot do our jobs adequately if much of our focus is on literally surviving. We end up failing our students and therefore ourselves for being unable to achieve our purpose in life, and we are currently powerless to end this vicious cycle.

All the best,

Jesse Lee Brooks