

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Amy Wickner, Electronic Records Archivist / PhD Candidate
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,

collective bargaining offers a powerful means for higher education workers to determine our own working and living conditions. This testimony will focus on the experiences of graduate assistants and library faculty. As a librarian, student, and former graduate assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park, I can attest that graduate assistants and librarians perform work that is necessary for a functioning university, and that enjoining us to perform this work without the right to collectively bargain is exploitation.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS: University administrators like to say that graduate assistants are "students first." The "students first" approach has not protected grad assistants' welfare or ability to balance earning wages with completing degree requirements, as administrators claim, nor is it intended to. Instead, it effectively denies an entire class of workers, who are also students, the rights they should be accorded as workers.

Many graduate assistants teach multiple sections or entire courses, including large general education, core curriculum, and introductory courses. Often the first instructors new students encounter at the College Park campus are graduate student workers. Graduate assistants conduct the research on which faculty members depend for their own advancement, taking responsibility for hands-on and/or repetitive tasks that faculty members and staff will not do. Graduate student workers keep labs and studies running while faculty pursue grants and other external funding on which the university bases its research enterprise. At the University Libraries, where I work, core library functions depend on the labor of graduate assistants: teaching, managing metadata, improving usability, processing archival collections, and maintaining digital systems. Graduate assistants fill crucial administrative and mentoring roles as academic advisors to large numbers of fellow students, or developing programs at the many centers on campus — such as the LGBT Equity Center and Multicultural Student Involvement and Community Advocacy (MICA) at the Stamp Student Union.

With collective bargaining rights, graduate assistants could negotiate for livable pay, safe and equitable working conditions, protections for international student workers, and access to housing — all deeply felt needs that UMD Fearless Student Employees has identified among our graduate peers. For example, among Big 10 universities, UMD has the largest gap between minimum graduate assistant stipends and local cost of living.

LIBRARY FACULTY: A financial analysis commissioned by UMD-AAUP shows that University of Maryland, College Park librarian positions on the permanent-status track (our equivalent of tenure track) fell to an 8-year low in 2022. This represents a 22% loss since 2015 with an especially dramatic loss of more than a tenth of positions relative to 2020. The loss of

positions has resulted in chronic overwork. Librarians are underpaid as well as overworked: Our average salary in 2021 was just 58% of the average salary for all full-time faculty.

Library administrators have tried filling the gaps with every possible category of short-term worker with even worse pay and protections: professional-track/adjunct faculty, contract staff, graduate assistants (as described above), hourly student workers, and volunteers. Exploiting these workers has not helped faculty librarians with our workloads or compensation, however. A more robust response is needed. With collective bargaining rights, faculty could negotiate for the funding, staffing, equitable working conditions, and job security needed to sustain the Libraries, a vital research and educational resource for the UMD community and beyond.

The university would collapse were graduate assistants and faculty to withhold our labor. University administrators across Maryland have long resisted collective bargaining rights for these workers out of fear, using duplicitous and divisive means. It's time for the General Assembly to hold these state institutions to account.

Sincerely,
Amy Wickner
Electronic Records Archivist / PhD Candidate
University Libraries / College of Information Studies
University of Maryland, College Park
2216 Hornbake Library, College Park, MD 20740
amy.wickner@gmail.com