

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

By Mauro Resmini

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 Mauro Resmini and I am Associate Professor of Cinema and Media Studies and Italian at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for 10 years, first as a part-time contingent faculty, and then as tenure-track—and now tenured—faculty. 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.

I teach four classes a year, at least one of which is a large lecture course, extremely popular, with 100 students enrolled. This class would simply be impossible to teach without the labor provided by two teaching assistants. They are most often graduate students, but I have also worked with contingent faculty. They attend all my lectures (twice a week), lead two discussion sections with 25 students each once a week, and grade students' quizzes, exams, and essays. This is for just one course: whether they are graduate students or contingent faculty, they are extremely likely to be assisting on or teaching another course, at the very least. Meanwhile, their primary focus remains to complete requirements for their degree or actively look for a permanent position—or, in the case of graduate students approaching their degree, both at the same time. This happens in a context in which Graduate Assistants stipends are well below the cost-of-living—something that became strikingly clear when I heard that several of my Teaching Assistants had to work another non-academic job just to survive. In fact, at UMD the gap between the cost-of-living and stipends is the largest compared to peer institutions, and in fields as disparate as Atmospheric Science and English Literature, UMD stipends are in real terms at (or near) the bottom on a national level. Foreign students are in a particularly precarious position since they are prohibited from working outside the university and their spouses do not have work visas. In sum, graduate assistants are overworked and underpaid. The same holds true for contingent faculty. There are 3,392 full time and over 900 part time contingent faculty at UMD (versus 1,399 tenured and tenure-track faculty). Their work conditions are precarious and their duties liable to change without notice, entirely exposed as they are to the whims of department chairs. And yet, the department to which I am primarily affiliated (the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures) would simply not be able to function—both at the level of teaching and advising—without their underpaid, precarious labor.

From 2014 to 2022, UMD saw the number of tenure-track and tenured faculty fall by 6.9%, and the number of contingent faculty increase by 19.3% in that same eight-year span. It is clear that this process of deliberate, structural “adjunctification” at UMD allows the university to rely on cheap, precarious labor whose demands can be more easily silenced or outright ignored (as it has been the case with the meet-and-confer process put in place by university administration in 2010). The proposed bill, if turned into law, would offer the opportunity to change this untenable situation. On the other hand, the shrinking of tenure-track and tenured faculty has also been accompanied by a persistent disparity between UMD salaries and its peers’. COLA-adjusted salaries for tenured and tenure-track faculty are the second lowest among UMD’s peers (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Ohio State University, for instance, offer salaries that are 58% and 48% higher than UMD, respectively). Passage of SB 247 may or may not lead to unionization, but it sets the stage for a democratic process in which university workers can engage in open debate and make an informed decision. The proposed bill, if enacted into law, would offer the opportunity to significantly improve working conditions for all workers in the UM System, from graduate students to contingent faculty, to tenured and tenure-track faculty.

Members of the committee, the right to collective bargaining 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.