



Testimony

SB660-Collective Bargaining-Chancellor of the University System of Maryland-Negotiations Support

My name is Todd Holden and for the past eight years, I have been employed as a web developer at the University of Maryland College Park. I am also a proud member of AFSCME Local 1072 and serve as a shop steward and as an at-large member of the local's executive board.

Can one say that a university system is truly innovative, forward-thinking, fiscally responsible, or world-leading when it negotiates a multitude of contracts for about 6500 employees?

Probably not, yet this is the reality of higher education collective bargaining in Maryland. At any given time, management and labor participate in a really inefficient and expensive dynamic where similar contract language is negotiated repeatedly for each bargaining unit at each university, only to be sent to the Chancellor and the Board of Regents for approval after ratification by the bargaining units. Why not simply negotiate with the USM directly?

While there are multiple benefits to adopting a centralized system for bargaining that would ultimately lead to greater efficiencies across the university system, the cost savings are apparent. It's worth noting that a lot of system institutions - College Park included - choose to hire outside attorneys to conduct negotiations. Multiply that for each university, and that is surely a lot of billable hours being paid for by Marylanders' tax dollars.

One must also acknowledge that under the current bargaining scheme, each union local has to assemble its own negotiating team. While these employees surely take pride in exercising their duty to represent workers, it does generate an amount of lost productivity as the employees must take time away from their regular duties.

Finally, if one were to compare all of the Memoranda of Understanding across the USM, one would find a great deal of redundancy in both the contract terms and the language used. Consolidating the contract language, while still retaining a process to negotiate specialized matters like parking, would ultimately produce better rights and expectations for all higher education employees, while affording the Board of Regents an opportunity to officially conduct the tangible oversight over collective bargaining it currently exercises already.

The consequences of inaction are already clear. When the majority of higher education employees do not earn a living wage, student service, student experiences, and the universities' missions to serve the public are all negatively impacted. Plainly acknowledging the deficiency present in the current system and fixing it will help Maryland's universities retain the standards of excellence we are each striving to achieve.

For these reasons, it is my hope your committee will support SB 660.