

2/4/21

House Bill 894 – Education – Community Colleges – Collective Bargaining

SUPPORT

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Stephen Torres and I'm an adjunct instructor at Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland. I'm writing to voice my support for HB 894 – Education – Community Colleges – Collective Bargaining. As you all may know, this bill would grant community college employees the right to be represented by a union and collectively bargain with their respective campus administrations. This is a right enjoyed by over 200,000 other public sector employees in the State of Maryland, and yet community college employees have been left behind and denied this basic right. This inequality is unjust and undervalues the lives and contributions of these essential workers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many community college instructors, like myself, were called upon by their respective schools to retrain to become online instructors, as it was necessary for the learning environment to shift from the classroom to the Zoom room. We did this to protect the health and safety of our students, faculty, and support staff from the deadly coronavirus. As our nation and state recover, and with community colleges predicted to play an important role in that recovery, it's more important now that we acknowledge how essential community college employees have been throughout this pandemic, and how important they will continue to be in training and retraining thousands of Marylanders. It is also imperative that they be given a voice in the decision-making process that determines the speed and manner in which their campuses are reopened, in order to ensure the continued prioritization of health and safety on campus. In addition, we seek to have the ability to bargain for better working conditions, such as greater job security. Adjunct instructors are hired on a per-semester basis and are often not notified of course cancellations until less than a week before the beginning of a new term, long after it would be reasonable to find employment at another institution. This makes the emotional and financial stability of being an adjunct difficult and means that the attention of the instructor must partly be toward being prepared to find new work, when they should be focused on the academic success of their students. Our working conditions are our students' learning conditions.

We have fought to gain this right for years. This bill is just the latest in a succession of bills that have been brought before the General Assembly that would grant community college faculty the right to collectively bargain. This is the year we pass this bill. Let's get Maryland back on the path to recovery by giving community colleges, and their employees, the tools for success and the respect they deserve. I ask you to vote yes on HB894 and strongly urge a favorable committee report.