

Testimony in support of House Bill 894
Education - Community Colleges - Collective Bargaining

Richard E. Otten, Ph.D.
Adjunct Instructor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Anne Arundel Community College
February 7, 2021

The Typical Adjunct Needs Collective Bargaining Rights

Dear members of the appropriations committee.

I have been teaching at AACC since 2004, and in many ways, I feel that I am a typical adjunct. There is, truly, no single typical adjunct, but because adjuncts make up over 75% of the instructional workforce and teach over 50% of the courses at Maryland community colleges, the typical community college instructor teaches only part-time – by choice or by necessity, since retiring full-timers are rarely replaced with new hires – and our substandard working conditions translate to substandard learning conditions for the typical community college student. We love our jobs, and that is the problem: the fact that teaching in our fields of expertise is our passion enables our exploitation, and when we express that passion in the classroom, we might prevent our students from realizing what they are missing. We love our jobs, and we are typically very good at teaching. We need collective bargaining rights if we hope to improve these circumstances, enabling us to turn this lousy gig into a meaningful career.

Contrary to what AACC administrators will have told you during their testimony in opposition to this bill, this piece of legislation enjoys strong support from AACC faculty. Last year, the Faculty Organization's Ad Hoc Committee on Shared Governance – on which I serve, along with a dozen full-time faculty members who resent the AACC administration's unilateral decision-making processes and its sustained bloat in comparison to the shrinking full-time faculty – conducted a survey of the AACC faculty's attitudes toward how shared governance is practiced at the college. One question asked, "Are you in favor of the Maryland General Assembly passing legislation allowing faculty to organize into unions at community colleges?" In response, 56% of the faculty responded "Yes," and 24% responded "Maybe." Although the full-time faculty indicated slightly stronger support than the part-time faculty, with 58% responding "Yes," compared to 54% of part-timers, adjuncts indicated significantly less opposition – only 12% "No," compared to 21% of the full-timers. Demonstrably, the AACC administration speaks for only a small minority of the AACC faculty when it obstructs our efforts to secure collective bargaining rights.

We adjuncts possess the same experience and credentials as our full-time colleagues, yet our working conditions are not equitable. We adjunct faculty have no meaningful representation within the existing self-governance structure at AACC. As the current co-chair of the Faculty Organization's Adjunct Faculty Affairs Committee, I know well that this structure provides an ineffectual forum within which to advocate to improve the working conditions of AACC part-time faculty members. We need collective bargaining rights to improve our circumstances, and in turn improve the circumstances that we can offer to our students. Please allow us to do so.