

Date 2/8/2021

**House Bill 894 – Education – Community Colleges – Collective Bargaining
SUPPORT**

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Richard Schumaker, and I live at 1 Westway, Greenbelt, MD 20770. I am writing to you regarding **House Bill 894 – Education – Community Colleges – Collective Bargaining** concerning collective bargaining in higher education in our state. As an adjunct professor in the Department of Philosophy at Prince George's Community College (PGCC), I feel that I am ideally placed to comment on the importance of a robust culture of collective bargaining in our state. The immediate passage of this bill is especially important because of the vast changes that the Covid 19 pandemic have brought to education in Prince George's County.

As college instructors all over the world complete their Spring 2021 semesters, they ponder the cross-roads they face as individual professionals and as members of institutions of higher education. For the last year, they have dealt with a perfect storm of challenging experiences: the anxiety and hardships of a global pandemic; the rapid, emergency transformation from in-person teaching to instruction at a distance; the national trauma of seemingly solid democratic institutions weakened and sometimes collapsing. It is unlikely that US higher education will ever be able to return to pre-coronavirus conventions and normality; the cross-roads that every institution and every instructor will encounter involves many things. It is my view that none of these challenges can be met without a strong culture of collective collaboration and this is very unlikely without the existence of formal collective negotiation. Let me enumerate three key challenges that will arise as we recover from Covid-19.

First, in the months to come, we will need to rethink what public health standards will look like. How will instructors and students interact in a safe way? What will we do about class size and social distancing? What about training faculty, students, and staff to meet basic health issues? What about college and university infrastructure issues as they relate to hygiene and safety? A framework of collective discussion and negotiation will enhance this.

Second, the function of technology needs must be revisited in most schools. The rapid adaptation that schools used to run emergency classes in the spring and fall of 2021 is not sustainable in the long run. Without formal feedback from all stakeholders, the possibilities of technology-enhanced education are unlikely to be met. At present, PGCC has no mechanism for adjunct professors to communicate their needs and concerns about the use of technology in education. A strong union would address this issue and improve teaching and learning at PGCC.

Thirdly, a multitude of curriculum issues arise dealing with discussions, labs, feedback and many other things. At present, at PGCC there is no mechanism for adjunct professors to influence curriculum issues. In fact, despite the fact that adjunct professors often have better

qualifications than full-time instructors, their suggestions are not only not requested but generally ignored.

In order to accomplish these things in a way that is suitable to the academic and larger communities, community colleges are going to need a maximum of good faith cooperation amongst all their stakeholders. Formal collective bargaining processes will improve this enormously. At present at PGCC, there is very little discussion or even interaction between staff, faculty, and administration about pressing post-Covid needs. PGCC urgently needs the presence of formal discussion processes between faculty, staff, and senior administration.

In my opinion, without the active presence of established unions to represent voices that are often not heard, Maryland's educational institutions will not be able to address the challenges that face the state in 2021 and beyond. I have worked in educational contexts with and without organized faculty and staff union representation, and there's really no comparison: the presence of union representation makes all the difference at every level: the community as a whole benefits enormously from the active participation of unions to assist in communication, management, and planning for future contingencies. I respectfully request that **House Bill 894 – Education – Community Colleges – Collective Bargaining** passed the Maryland state legislature as quickly as possible. **I ask you to vote yes on HB 894 and strongly urge a favorable committee report.**

Richard Schumaker
Philosophy Dept
PGCC, Feb 2021