

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland House Appropriations Committee  
By BEHNAM TAHMASBI, Reseach Assistant  
HB 493**

**State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate Assistants  
February 9, 2024**

**FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee,

My name is Behnam Tahmasbi, and I am a third-year PhD student and research assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park, affiliated with the department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. I have been part of the academic community here for over three years. I urge this committee to issue a favorable report to this Bill. The state of Maryland already recognizes the right of collective bargaining for nearly every state employee, including faculty at community colleges and the non-academic workforce at our four-year institutions. It is only logical and fair that this right be extended to all higher education workers within the state.

In my role, I am involved in a variety of research projects, not all of which are directly related to my thesis. This variety enriches my academic experience but also highlights the diverse responsibilities held by graduate research assistants. My work spans several disciplines, contributing to projects within the National Center for Smart Growth and other departments. This broad scope of work illustrates that graduate students are more than just students; we are employees contributing significantly to our university's research output and academic prestige. Despite the essential nature of our work, we often face challenges such as limited job security, inconsistent workloads, and a lack of formal contracts outlining our responsibilities and rights.

Supporting this bill is critical for improving the working conditions and overall well-being of graduate research assistants and other higher education workers in Maryland. Many of us face difficulties related to inadequate salaries, large class sizes, limited control over our curriculum, and uncertain job stability. By enabling collective bargaining, we can address these concerns more effectively, ensuring fair treatment, equitable opportunities, and a voice in governance for all employees. This change would not only enhance the quality of education but also contribute to the prosperity of Maryland and its residents by fostering a more supportive, stable, and equitable academic environment.

Members of the Committee, for decades, collective bargaining between state employees and management has been recognized as the best way to promote democracy in our workplaces and public institutions. It is a fundamental human right and a proven method to ensure that the conditions governing our workplaces are fair and beneficial for all. This right has been granted to many other public higher education institutions across the nation, and to ignore its value for our state's four-year public higher education institutions is unjustifiable. I strongly advocate for a favorable report to this Bill, to align Maryland with the best practices of employee relations and to uphold the rights and dignity of its higher education workforce.

Sincerely,  
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*This testimony has been submitted on behalf of this individual by the University of Maryland Graduate Labor Union (GLU) and the Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (UMD AAUP).  
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