



Written Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House Appropriations Committee

By Thomas W. Abrams, PhD, Professor, University of Maryland School of Medicine
and Vice-Chair Council of University System Faculty

HB 493

State Personnel – Collective Bargaining –
Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, Postdoctoral Associates and Graduate Assistants
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FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee. I am Tom Abrams, and I have been a professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine for nearly 3 decades. I have served on the UMB Faculty Senate for 6.5 years and I am currently the Vice-chair of the Council of University System Faculty (CUSF), which serves as an advisory body to USM Chancellor Perman and includes faculty from all USM campuses.

I would like to address two issues relevant for considering whether collective bargaining should be permitted at USM institutions. First, I have heard it suggested that collective bargaining could undermine the cooperative relationship between faculty and administration or between graduate students and faculty, or that given the existing shared governance mechanisms, unions would be redundant. As someone who has participated in shared governance at both the level of the UMB Faculty Senate and CUSF, I think this redundancy argument completely ignores the reality of shared governance as structured at USM universities. Both the Faculty and the Student Senates have roles that are advisory to the administration. These shared governance bodies have no decision-making power. (They make decisions in very limited areas – e.g., selection of awards and scheduling of some events.) Moreover, financial matters and employment conditions, such as compensation and benefits are rarely if ever discussed with the Faculty or Student Senates.

The second important argument for existence of unions is as a mechanism to address instances of harassment or bullying. Faculty currently have very limited avenues to address this type of misconduct effectively. Typically bullying and intimidation occur in interactions with administrators. University ombudsmen and HR departments are supervised by the administration, and depend on the administration's good will. I want to emphasize that bullying and abuse are very rare events. Nevertheless, when they do occur, they can be psychologically traumatic and can dramatically undermine productivity, both for the individual who is targeted and for the school. In a few cases with which I am familiar, grant funding is actually suspended – without due process. The personal toll can be tremendous. As one example, two years ago, I attended a thesis seminar by a student whom I had known earlier, in advanced course. I had written a supportive recommendation for her for an NIH fellowship application, which she received. She was highly competent. In her seminar, she appeared weak, extremely hesitant, and



lacked even minimal self-confidence. When I enquired, I learned that when she was twice ill with COVID, she had extensive conflicts with her advisor, leaving her traumatized. This promising doctoral student, now a PhD, decided to leave research – a loss for our state and our country. This sounds anecdotal, but the CUSF Research Committee has obtained statistics on Asia-born postdoctoral fellows and research associates. Asian faculty have recently been targeted for abuse, or accused of misconduct without due process. The numbers of research associates from China at UMB and UMCP have dropped by 65%, from a high of 664 to as low as 235. Asian-born researchers are major part of the highly skilled MD workforce in biomedical research, in engineering and in technology development; their loss will have a substantial adverse economic effect over time. In summary, harassed faculty leave the university and often the state of Maryland. Mistreatment of faculty takes a large economic toll. It is not only Asian faculty. I recently observed the serious harassment of a senior colleague, a holocaust survivor. Her research was disrupted and commercialization of a promising patented melanoma therapy that she had developed was undermined. In many of these situations, where faculty are harassed, academic freedom is compromised. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no effective process to protect academic freedom in USM.

In conclusion, I support the passage of HB 493.