

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee**

By Thomas G Zeller, Professor

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 Thomas Zeller and I am a professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for 22 years. I am a resident of Greenbelt, MD, where many of my neighbors work for U-Md or have attended it. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to this Bill. Two of my representatives in Annapolis, Senator Alonzo Washington and Delegate Nicole Williams, have already signaled their support for this bill. Delegate Williams is one of its co-sponsors.

The state already grants this right towards nearly every other state employee, as well as the faculty at our community colleges and the non-academic workforce at our 4 year institutions. It is clear that this right should be extended to the rest of higher education in Maryland. Graduate students and non-permanent faculty (called "professional track faculty" on our campus) need to be able to unionize in order to improve their working conditions. Instructors and students will benefit from these changes. Graduate assistants are afraid of speaking up because of their uncertain status. Between 20 and 36 percent of graduate assistants work more than the stipulated 20 hours, which slows down their progress. Their stipends are low and often below the cost of living. Low stipend levels disproportionately affect historically underserved groups.

On the College Park campus, there are 3,392 professional-track faculty. They teach most of the credit hours on campus. However, their status is precarious. Contracts can be given or withdrawn at the last minute, and even instructors who have taught for more than a decade can be fired without a reason given. Their pay is often low. Regarding tenured and tenure-track faculty, their number has fallen by 6.9% between 2014 and 2022, while the number of non-tenure track faculty has risen by 19.3% during the same period. Given these inequities, it is important that collective bargaining will be allowed on our campus. It would improve working conditions for the most vulnerable instructional faculty on our campus and provide better instruction for our students. Additionally, it would help faculty to attract the best graduate students, who often choose unionized campuses because working conditions there are better.

Members of the committee, this state has for decades viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as the best way to enroot democracy in our workplaces and public education institutions. The right to collective bargaining has been long recognized not only as a fundamental human right, but it has also in this state been seen as the best method of ensuring that employee voices play a vital role in constructing conditions that govern our workplaces. It is a right granted to many other public higher ed institutions in the county, and indeed to many private, prestigious institutions in our own state. The reasons to exempt 4-year public institutions from this path just no longer make sense. I again therefore call for a favorable report to this Bill.

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).
Please contact us at mail@umdgradworkers.org or umdaaup@gmail.com if you have any questions.*