

HB 493  
Favorable  
Pia Morrison, SEIU Local 500

Chairman Barnes and Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

As the President of SEIU Local 500, a union of over 20,000 workers that represent faculty and staff at various universities and colleges throughout the DMV, I have seen firsthand how collective bargaining changes a workforce for the better. Over the past several years, new bargaining units have developed at some of our most prestigious institutions of higher learning in the region. The issues faced by faculty and graduate student employees are echoed from school to school, from private to public institutions, from large Research 1 universities to community colleges. The issues we see locally in academic workforces are also broadly systemic in our nation. Too often, the idea of running universities like a business has resulted in squeezing faculty and graduate student employees – requiring these student-facing academic workers to do more with less. They face stagnant compensation, higher workloads, and less stability leading to low morale and high employee turnover. Dissent and dissatisfaction are met with hostility and hesitancy rather than self-reflection on the part of the university administrations.

And, yet, once workers have unionized and negotiated contracts, morale greatly improves. This in turn, improves the campus climate in which students are learning. When faculty and graduate student employees gain a voice as stakeholders in their own working conditions, education itself is enhanced.

Collective bargaining rights, union jobs with living wages, and making Maryland one of the best places to work and learn in this nation has long been a priority of many of you for years. However, year after year, public sector workers in this state have had to come before this body piecemeal to be granted the right to collectively bargain. I find it ironic that the other states that seem to be the battlefronts for the labor movement enshrine collective bargaining rights for all public sector workers in their constitution, and here in Maryland we are still leaving people behind.

Our governor Wes Moore has laid out a bold agenda this session to ensure no Marylander gets left behind. Let this be the year the members of this committee and the general assembly make that a reality for workers in the University System of Maryland.

I ask you to be bold, to move democracy forward. I ask you to support HB 493 and grant collective bargaining rights to faculty and grad students at our state universities.

Thank you,

Pia Morrision, President  
SEIU Local 500