

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

By Lauren Salig, PhD Student

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 Lauren Salig, and I am a PhD student at the University of Maryland, where I have worked and studied for four and a half years. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to this Bill. The state already grants the right of collective bargaining towards nearly every other state employee, as well as the faculty at our community colleges and the non-academic workforce at our four-year institutions. It is clear that this right should be extended to all higher ed workers in Maryland.

During my time at the University of Maryland, I have spent time working as a graduate research assistant and as a graduate teaching assistant. As a graduate teaching assistant, I assisted in classes of approximately sixty students with my responsibilities including: running classroom activities, giving lectures, grading papers, and meeting with students outside of class. This work was always in addition to my dissertation research, service to my program and department, and involvement in the broader community through outreach work.

As a PhD student at the University of Maryland, I have experienced first-hand how low graduate assistant stipends can be. The FY2024 minimum salary that can be given to full graduate assistants on a 9.5 year appointment (which is the only appointment length that I have ever been offered) is \$26,958. I live in Silver Spring, Maryland and am on the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit program. Even as part of that reduced housing program, my rent and parking alone cost me over \$20,000 a year. If I opted to live in a studio apartment in the available graduate housing (Graduate Hills & Gardens), housing would still cost me over \$16,000 a year. The minimum salary is largely what is being offered to graduate assistants, and it is not sufficient for the work we do to support students' learning and University research. I am fortunate enough to have additional fellowships that make my salary livable; I sought external fellowships because the stipends at the University are insufficient. Without my extra fellowships (which most students don't have), I am unsure how I would be able to make ends meet. I am in my fifth year of my PhD program. Many graduate students work for the University for many years as we get our degrees. Being able to have collective bargaining is a democratic right that we deserve. It can be a force for equity and allow for clearer communication between administration and employees. Many other universities already have collective bargaining to everyone's advantage--consider Montgomery College, for example. Collective bargaining rights could do a lot of good for improving the lives of graduate student employees by giving us power to advocate for changes when they are needed.

Members of the committee, employees' needs and voices deserve to be heard. The right to collective bargaining is a fundamental right; it should not be arbitrarily withheld from certain individuals at four-year public institutions. Therefore, I again 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.*