

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
By Mehl Penrose, Associate 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 Mehl Penrose. I am an Associate Professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for the past 17 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.

As a tenured professor, I typically prepare and teach two courses per semester. The classes I teach, almost entirely upper-division (junior/senior level) undergraduate as well as graduate, range in size from a few students in my seminars to 25 students in our required courses for the major. Besides my teaching load, I also engage in a significant amount of service work, which means that I collaborate on projects and tasks in my department, college, university, and professional associations. For example, right now I serve as Director of Undergraduate Studies for the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. These service obligations normally require a considerable amount of time each week, even though they are weighted little in faculty's annual reviews. In addition to my pedagogical and committee-based assignments, I have a full research agenda. I attend conferences and publish articles and books in my field. Even though, as per the university, this is supposed to be the task that occupies most of my time each week, the reality is that teaching, advising, and service obligations take up the vast majority of my time, leaving little time to read, write, research, and prepare talks. I, like many faculty members I know, spend an inordinate amount of time during the summers on our research, a time period when we are not paid.

The reason I support this bill, however, is not due to my own workload. I am tenured, so I am protected against wrongful or frivolous termination to a great degree. I am concerned about my non-tenured colleagues, full-time lecturers, part-time adjuncts, and graduate teaching assistants, whose pay is extremely low, especially given the high level of education that they have and which the university demands. Often times, professional-track faculty, as they are known here at UMD, have large class sizes, little or no control over the curriculum, and a lack of job security. Over the years, at this university and at others across this nation, senior administration is consistently choosing to hire less tenure-track or tenured faculty members in favor of non-tenure track and non-tenured instructors. Meanwhile, in the past 50 years administrators' numbers have grown exponentially. The long-term effect of this is to degrade departments, curricula, morale, and the academic quality of programs across campus. How can a university be serious in its mission to provide a high-quality education when it is decimating the tenured faculty ranks in favor of instructors who are often less experienced and, because of the precariousness of and low remuneration for their positions, are much more likely to seek employment elsewhere?

Maryland legislators often talk about equity and social justice. They can work toward these

goals by collectivizing university instructional professionals, who are the only group of State of Maryland workers who do not have the right to organize a collective bargaining unit - even though community college instructors do, university administrative and clerical staff do, K-12 teachers do, and state non-university employees do. What logic makes it wise to separate out one group who, as I explain above, could improve the student experience at universities by being allowed to bargain collectively?

This state has for decades viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as the best way to promote democracy in our workplaces and public institutions. The right to collective bargaining has long been recognized as not only a fundamental human right, but also 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 nation, and indeed to many private, prestigious institutions in our own state. The reasons to exempt four-year public higher ed institutions from this path make no 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.*