

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
By Nate Beard, PhD candidate and research assistant
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 Nate Beard, and I am a PhD candidate, teacher, and researcher in the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am writing this testimony in support of HB0493 & SB0823, legislation granting collective bargaining rights to higher education workers in Maryland. I respectfully ask the committee to issue a favorable report to this bill.

I have been both a graduate research and teaching assistant over the past 4.5 years. For the past two years I have been a teaching assistant for 50 undergraduate students per semester in the engineering department where students learn analytical skills to understand and assess the complex relationships between science, technology, ethics, and policy. I teach full classes, design curriculum and learning activities, grade and provide feedback on assignments, meet one-on-one with students who might be struggling or who want to learn more about a subject, and generally support students who will become innovative leaders in the fields of science and technology. As a research assistant, I have conducted research on digital privacy, student athlete educational experiences, social media algorithms and governance, and the social and ethical impacts of automation and artificial intelligence on workers and historically marginalized populations. As expected of all PhDs, I also review journal articles for prestigious academic journals and participate in global conferences, workshops, and projects. Teaching students and conducting research takes up the majority of my weeks, after which I must make time for me dissertation--the main reason I am in graduate school. While university administrators will likely say that these activities contribute directly to our dissertation research, that is only partly true in my case, and rarely true for others. My dissertation research is a separate project that aims to contribute innovative insights in order to graduate. This includes fieldwork, research, and writing that cannot be done as part of teaching or research assistantships. I have done this while taking extra jobs or loans because the pay is so poor (I started at \$23K and currently at \$30K before taxes), which also means that I am forgoing opportunities to invest in health, a home, and my future for at least 6 years while in my 30s.

Supporting this bill granting us collective bargaining rights would enable us to improve working conditions, such as living wages, job stability, and protections against harassment, abuse, and overwork, which ultimately would improve student educational experiences, diversity and inclusion, and shared governance and effective use of university resources. We are not guaranteed assistantships--many of us must scramble every semester and summer to find work. More stable and reliable appointments would decrease stress and help focus our energies on teaching and research. Better pay and workplace protections would increase the ability to recruit and retain top talent and grads from historically marginalized communities. I know so many grads who have either dropped out or chose to go to other universities that provide adequate wages and support for grads dealing with overwork, discrimination, or simply navigating university policies and issues with supervisors.

Instead of supporting collective bargaining, adequate living wages, and a supportive work environment, university leadership spends time and money lobbying and testifying to the state legislator against our democratic rights--directly undermining our university values and public mission to serve the public through innovative research and student education. Instead of fully reinvesting state funds and tuition in teaching, research, and living wages for employees, leadership spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on third-party consultants like rpk group, which elsewhere advised and justified spending cuts on teaching and research, and Huron consulting, which has a well-documented history of anti-labor consulting. That said, I have high hopes that our state representatives can fix these issues by enabling real shared governance and support higher ed workers, families, and communities given past and recent progress in granting collective bargaining rights to non-academic workers, k-12 teachers, and community college workers.

Members of the Committee, our working conditions are our students' education conditions and our university's ability to produce cutting-edge research. The Maryland General Assembly 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 by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the U.S. National Labor Relations Act, 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 all graduate workers at private universities, as well as many other peer public higher ed institutions across the nation. Thousands of graduate workers over the past decade have indicated their support for collective bargaining rights bill. The day-to-day functioning of the university relies on the labor of a now-growing majority of grads who have signed union cards. Graduate workers in other states were forced to engage in mass collective and direct actions to secure collective bargaining rights and dignified working conditions, but we are hopeful that our state representatives will choose to support this bill that will inevitably improve our lives and Maryland's public higher education institutions. Therefore, I respectfully call for a favorable report on 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.*