

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
HB0493
State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate
Assistants**

February 9, 2024

FAVORABLE

Good afternoon Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee.

My name is Michelle Mazurek and I am an Associate Professor in Computer Science and UMIACS, at the University of Maryland College Park, where I have worked for more than nine years. I also serve as the director of the Maryland Cybersecurity Center, an interdisciplinary research center focused on digital security, privacy, and safety research. I call on the committee to issue a favorable report to this bill. Maryland already allows collective bargaining for nearly every other state employee, as well as faculty at our community colleges and the non-academic workforce at four-year institutions. It's clear and critical that this vital right should be extended to all higher ed workers in Maryland.

Computer science is by far the largest major on campus (more than 3500 undergraduate majors), and our student-faculty ratios are dramatically higher than elsewhere on campus or at peer institutions around the country. As a result, even our senior level classes – such as the senior elective in computer security that I teach – often have 90 or 120 students, and our lower-division classes are enormous. When I teach these large courses, I spend so much time on logistics and administration that I rarely have the opportunity to get to know students in depth or provide targeted instruction, which is detrimental to the students. Our dramatically out-of-whack student-faculty ratios, combined with insufficient staff support, create major logistical challenges and extreme service burdens for both tenure-track and professional track faculty, and limits our ability to innovate our curriculum, offer research opportunities to undergraduates, and support broad-based computing education on campus.

As a faculty member, I also interact with grad students every day as my students, my mentees, my research and teaching assistants, and my colleagues. Without graduate student employees, I simply could not accomplish my research goals, and graduate TAs help to fill the administrative gaps caused by our large class sizes. However, grad students are not treated and compensated in accordance with their critical role at the university, receiving a salary which is significantly below the living wage in Prince George's County and lower than many comparable graduate programs, even those with lower cost of living. Further, our traineeship model for PhD students has many wonderful benefits, including the ability to build close working relationships, as well as lifelong collaborations, between advisers and advisees. But it also creates structural risks of

exploitation, because advisers have significant power over their students and few checks on their authority.

Enacting this bill will help to make progress on these and other critical issues around campus, by enabling faculty and grad students to bargain for better working conditions, which will allow us to better support the students we serve. It will help faculty – especially the early-career faculty in my department, who work incredibly hard under very difficult conditions to support their undergraduate and graduate students – to maintain high standards of excellence while avoiding the burnout that drives many of our junior faculty away after only a few years. It will empower graduate students to have more equity in their relationships with their advisers and ensure they are treated more fairly. It will restore balance to the ideal of shared governance by enabling all the constituencies at the university to have an independent, active, and meaningful voice and a seat at the table that cannot be ignored.

Members of the committee, we know that collective bargaining is and will continue to be the single most effective way to promote democracy in our workplaces and public institutions. Collective bargaining is a fundamental human right that is already in place and working well at our community colleges, at public colleges and universities around the county, and at prestigious private colleges and universities here in Maryland. Enabling collective bargaining will help our public four-year institutions to thrive. I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on this bill.