

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

By Robyn Muncy, 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 Robyn Muncy, and I am a professor of history at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for 33 years. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report on the collective bargaining bill for University of Maryland system faculty. The state already grants the right of collective bargaining to 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 the rest of higher education in Maryland.

I am very fortunate to teach and research twentieth-century United States history, especially women's history, the history of social movements, and social policy. In a typical year, I teach two courses in twentieth-century U.S. history each semester, supervise the research of five graduate students, and participate in the governance of my department, college, and university. In addition, of course, I pursue my own research and participate in the life of the historical profession.

I love my research and teaching more than I can adequately express, but the conditions of my work have changed dramatically during the last 30+ years and not always for the better. Indeed, I am alarmed by the increasing administrative burden imposed by the university on all faculty, which competes with teaching and research for faculty time and bandwidth. More hours every year must be spent learning the latest digital reporting system or newest teaching technology and reformatting documents to match the needs of the university's latest (and usually cheaper?) technologies. Most of the university's reporting requirements assume the scholarly forms and research protocols of the sciences into which humanities scholars and teachers must somehow squeeze representations of their very different sort of work. This is outrageously time-consuming and, frankly, demoralizing. Moreover, the university administration has in the last two years made unilateral decisions about health protocols that, in my view, have unnecessarily risked the well-being of faculty, students, and staff. Every constituency should have had a say in these decisions. And the administration has at the last minute unilaterally canceled classes late in the semester without regard to the academic integrity of courses or the additional work such last-minute changes inevitably mean for responsible faculty members, who actually value what they teach.

Another worrying trend at UMD is an increasing reliance on non-tenure-track faculty for teaching undergraduates. As you know, the erosion of tenure diminishes the power of faculty in any institution, and the conditions shaping the lives of non-tenure-track faculty are often abhorrent. They are abhorrent not only to the well-being of individual faculty members who must teach such heavy loads that they have to choose between their health and continuing their own research but also to the educations of our undergraduates. Faculty who do not know from one semester to the next what or even whether they will be teaching and who carry untenable course loads in order to make ends meet, cannot possibly be as well prepared for

their classes as they would prefer to be. Moreover, because they sometimes have to teach at multiple institutions to pay their bills, they cannot be as available to students as they would be if they were securely employed at one institution. The precarity of their lives shapes the educational opportunity of their students. As dedicated teachers in the American Federation of Teachers always say, teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions.

Faculty at every level know what it takes to deliver the best education and most innovative research possible, which is why we need the democratic voice in university life that collective bargaining will grant us. With collective bargaining rights, faculty will be able to improve the conditions under which ALL faculty labor and redirect the trajectory away from an increasingly precarious professoriate.

Faculty at the University of Maryland need collective bargaining rights so that we can keep teaching our wonderful and richly deserving students at the highest level possible and producing cutting-edge scholarship. We need power to shape our workplace so that teaching and scholarship--rather than fears for our health or how we are going to learn the latest utterly nonsensical technology for graduate admissions--remain the center of our focus.

I ask you to support this year's collective bargaining bill for all faculty at the University of Maryland. Collective bargaining democratizes workplaces, and in this historical moment when democracy is under threat in crucial quarters, we need to demonstrate our commitment to it in every arena of our life together. Maryland has for decades shown that collective bargaining is good for state employees and for state institutions. Many other public institutions of higher education across the country grant collective bargaining rights to faculty as do many private, prestigious institutions in our own state. It is hard to figure out why this fundamental human right is still denied the faculty at Maryland's four-year public colleges and universities. I look forward to your favorable report on our collective bargaining 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.*