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**Written Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House Appropriations Committee
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HB 493

**State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, Postdoctoral
Associates and Graduate Assistants**

February 13, 2023

FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee. I am Karin Rosemblatt, and I am a Professor of History at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked since 2008. I serve also as President of our College Park chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and I am on the AAUP's National Council. I urge this committee to issue a favorable report to HB 493.

As you know, the bill before you does not prescribe unionization and collective bargaining. It only allows for that possibility. Passage of this bill seems uncontroversial. After all, unlike legislatures elsewhere, the Maryland legislature is not anti-union. Unlike legislators in Florida or Indiana, Maryland legislators have not been trying to undermine institutions of higher education, curtail the free speech rights of faculty, or dictate what and how we teach.

Universities are under threat in many states, where State governments seek to limit the free inquiry that has made our universities the envy of the world. But institutions of higher education are also threatened by the longstanding defunding of higher education, the Uberification of our workforce, and by top-down management styles that erode shared governance. Maryland faculty, like their colleagues around the country, feel very deeply the fragility of our higher education institutions and our livelihoods. My colleagues and I feel acutely that we must have every tool available to us to be able to speak loudly, with a collective voice. Collective bargaining is an effective form of faculty voice, one which the AAUP has long viewed as compatible with—and indeed able to complement and prop up—institutions of shared governance.

In my role as faculty member, I regularly teach and advise graduate and undergraduate students interested in the History of Latin America and the Caribbean. I also run a Center for Historical Studies in my Department. I headed our Latin American Studies Center for five years. And I am Principal Investigator for a five-year National Science Foundation Grant to promote and develop the History of Science, Technology, Environment, and Medicine in Latin America and the Caribbean. I do a lot of service to my profession as well, conducting tenure, promotion and department reviews for other institutions; peer

reviewing books and articles; serving on prize, nomination, and program committees for professional organizations and my university; mentoring graduate students from other institutions and early career scholars. I have been a mentor to two Presidential Postdoctoral Scholars. This program aims to recruit and retain outstanding faculty from underrepresented groups.

I find this work very satisfying, but since the ranks of tenured professors has dwindled, the workload for those of us remaining has become untenable. Tenured faculty do a lot of unremunerated work, but at least we are paid decently—if not well—by our employers. A crisis within academia is reaching a breaking point as the majority of our non-tenure-track faculty members (75% of all higher education instructors in Maryland's institutions of higher education) do not have the ability to take on this work. Their teaching is simply too taxing for them to do unpaid service work. The Universities that have produced so much cutting edge research and given so much luster to the United States and to the State of Maryland are imperiled.

As President of our campus AAUP chapter, I have learned a great deal about the issues our faculty face on the College Park campus. Let me underscore the three issues that come up most frequently: the failures of shared governance; poor working conditions for non-tenure-line faculty; and working conditions for graduate students. Collective bargaining can provide a democratic means of addressing all three areas of concern. University administrators will claim that these issues can and have been addressed through mechanisms of shared governance, but those mechanisms (and other mechanisms of redress) have been in place for decades without and pressing problems have not been addressed. It's time to make a change.

Faculty Governance is not working. I have long observed that on my campus, committees in which faculty are meant to play key roles according to the Universities own guidelines are chock full of administrators. This was clearly the case with my university's Strategic Planning Committee. Its members had an average salary of over \$300,000. Last year, a hiring committee for a Dean of the Graduate School had two students and two faculty members among its sixteen members. And a Budget Subcommittee of the University Senate, which was meant to increase transparency and accountability, is has not been able to function because the administration has not given it the information it needs. Almost all University committees are like this, even ones dealing with curriculum. Tenure is another area in which the faculty is supposed to weigh in. USM procedures stipulate that changes to tenure guidelines must be approved by faculty committees of the University Senate. Yet guidelines have been changed by fiat. This contravenes the letter and spirit of shared governance.

More troubling still is the proliferation of programs staffed by non-tenure track faculty. In these programs, administrators make all the curricular decisions—again in contravention of the principles of shared governance. Moreover, faculty who are worried about whether their contract will be renewed are loath to raise their voices. The non-tenure-track faculty who are closest to our students—and who teach 70% of the credit hours on our campus—are effectively muzzled. This situation pleases administrators who think they know best and often follow the latest fad (often based on shoddy research). But it is not good for our students. Those who teach our students, who are closest to our students, need a firm voice in curricular policies and policies regarding research.

Working conditions for non-tenure-track faculty are abysmal. To say that non-tenure-track faculty on our campus are upset would be a gross understatement. They are fearful and resentful. They work very hard for our students but feel unappreciated. They cannot teach or give opinions freely because they fear that their contracts will not be renewed. Many declined to write testimony for this hearing because they feel vulnerable to reprisal. The most common complaint we hear at College Park is not about low salaries,

but about job insecurity. It is one thing to face unemployment if you are in a field where there is job mobility and/or decent wages. But academic jobs are scarce, people have family responsibilities that limit mobility, and low pay means that there is no buffer to cushion unemployment.

I know of one colleague, who has worked at the institution for over twenty years and had her salary cut in half simply because the Chair of her Department felt she was too abrasive. A group of instructors in an Honors College received their contract days before the start of classes to find that their teaching load had been increased. These types of stories are common because policies do not provide security or stability, and there (by design) is no enforcement of existing policies that are in reality only “best practices” suggestions left to the discretion of department heads. Some of these department heads are fair minded. Others are not. Some are frankly bigoted. The result is a majority of faculty cowed and beaten down. Despite the admirable job these faculty do teaching our students, students cannot learn to be innovative, entrepreneurial, and creative when their instructors are just trying to keep their heads down.

Graduate Assistants are overworked and underpaid. You will hear University administrators say that unionization will ruin the relationship between advisors and mentees. But they have never asked faculty our opinion! Most faculty I know feel that the low stipends and poor work conditions endured by graduate students is one of the main issues our University faces, and that it undermines the standing of our institution.

Because I have supervised more than 12 PhD and MA students and sat on the committees of dozens more, I can speak from personal experience. I have personally supervised graduate assistants who worked as bartenders on the weekends. One of my advisees taught a course at Prince George’s Community College to make ends meet. I routinely sign papers that allow my students to take on work above and beyond the twenty hours a week that graduate assistants are normally permitted to work. I do so reluctantly, because this is time that they should be devoting to their studies. But I sign nevertheless because the students cannot survive without a supplement to their income. I note that this no doubt makes it more difficult for graduate assistants to complete their degrees in a timely manner, and this is an important metric against which our university is measured. It is exceedingly difficult to recruit top graduate students when stipends are low and working conditions are (by design) unregulated.

The international graduate students who powerfully contribute to the prestige and finances of our campus are particularly vulnerable. They are by law prohibited from working outside the universities where they study. They have additional travel costs. And many come to the United States with their families. US immigration legislation prohibits the spouses of these students from working. Can you imagine trying to support a spouse—or a spouse and child—with \$25,000 while paying for books and other research expenses? I personally know a student in that situation. He is, unsurprisingly, food insecure.

Many graduate assistants are asked to work more than the required twenty hours a week. I have seen this more than once in my own department. During the COVID19 crisis, one of my own advisees had to take over a course when the instructor of record disappeared. He had minimal support, and he was not teaching in his area of expertise. Many departments are not good at informing graduate assistants about their rights and obligations. Nor are many faculty members aware of what is appropriate. A graduate assistant union would help clarify and publicize the rights and obligations of graduate assistants. And it would give students access to support from someone who does not have the

The Bottom Line. You may be asking how much unionization might cost the State and its Universities. Keep in mind that only about 28.7% of the UMD budget goes toward instruction and that every year the University takes in about \$130 million more than it spends. Current administration has chosen to increase the number of administrators 42% from 2015 to 2019 and an additional 8.4% from 2020 to 2022. The

largest increases in spending are in the institutional expenses category, which includes the salaries of upper administration. The second largest increases are in the category that includes Deans and Associate Deans. Budgets are about choices. University administrators have made their choices. Now let faculty and graduate students make theirs.