

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

By Amy Wickner, Electronic Records Archivist & PhD Candidate

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 Amy Wickner and I'm a PhD candidate, former Graduate Assistant, and current Electronic Records Archivist (faculty Librarian) at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I've worked for 10 years. I call on the 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 Electronic Records Archivist since 2017, I run the digital archiving, electronic records management, and web archiving programs in Special Collections and University Archives (a department of the Libraries at UMCP). I preserve digital archival records from sources like old media, cloud and network storage, and websites; in formats like documents, social media, audio, video, and email. I help donors of archival materials and campus offices figure out what to send to the archives, and help other archivists figure out what to keep and how to make sure people can access and use it. I maintain a store of legacy computing equipment to be able to read disks, drives, and files dating back to the 1980s. I train other archivists and current archives students on these methods, providing an education that they didn't get in their masters programs or other professional development.

As a Graduate Assistant in the Libraries from 2014 to 2017, I did all of the above for one quarter to one third of the pay and on an ostensibly part-time schedule. Realistically, being solely responsible for several programs in the archives has always meant working more than the time in my contracts, with few or no others in the department who can help with the work, and while putting in second and third shifts to complete coursework and dissertation research. As my graduate worker colleagues have demonstrated, time and again, GAs in Maryland don't make a living wage. Some of my tasks as a UMCP worker have been relevant to my research over the years, but most aren't. Anyway, being horribly overworked means not being able to apply what I learn in my research to the relevant archival activities; there are too many fires to put out.

I support the current bill for several reasons. First, library workers at colleges and universities in Maryland are overworked and underpaid in every classification. We're not alone in this; read the testimonies of graduate assistants and non-tenure-track faculty from across the state for evidence. Through collective bargaining, we could negotiate to actually staff the library system and every other program at the levels they need to be excellent, for instance with staffing minimums for specific functions. We could negotiate to establish salary equity across units and job classifications, repairing years of compression, redressing years of harm to graduate workers, and removing one of the greatest obstacles to retaining faculty Librarians at UMCP.

Second, colleges and universities in Maryland are too quick to turn to contingent positions (adjuncts, PTK faculty, visiting positions, and more) to temporarily patch up staffing gaps in core programs like teaching, research, and running an 8-branch library system. As I describe above, many programs and services run largely or entirely on grad labor for this reason. Pleading poverty, administrators at every level expect services to function seamlessly without committing serious, necessary, long-term investment to personnel. This kind of short-term thinking only leads to precarity, instability, and burnout for all workers involved. Administrators in the Libraries have furthermore turned to low-paid temporary positions, like so-called Resident Librarians or Library Fellows for Inclusive Excellence, to pay lip service to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in staffing. The disrespect for library workers of marginalized identities is stunning and pervasive. Through collective bargaining, we could insist on the creation of good jobs, equitable hiring practices, and safe, fair working conditions that fully and sustainably staff teaching and research programs as well as the large and complex library system they require.

Third, a shared concern among my colleagues in the Libraries (staff, faculty, graduate assistants, and hourly student workers alike) is lack of substantive administrative support for staff-initiated DEI efforts. Through collective bargaining, we could continue to build a united employee voice for library-based actions that support social justice -- beyond the lip service our administrators would prefer to see.

Members of the Committee, I urge you to issue a favorable report for this Bill that extends the right to collectively bargain to all higher education workers in Maryland. We know how to build democratic workplaces and public institutions; give us the tools to do so.

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.