

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

By Caleb Ruck

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 Caleb Ruck, and I am a graduate student with a full-time graduate assistantship at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where I have worked for 6 years (since the start of my undergraduate degree). I call on this 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.

The terms of my assistantship involve fully teaching (not assisting, but rather, fully conducting/executing the course) two sections of Spanish and providing office hours to my students while also completing my own coursework and volunteer & professional development obligations. In addition, I work a second job, as one job alone does not pay my expenses.

This semester, I am teaching 50 undergraduate students Elementary Spanish, as my graduate program is connected to the Modern Languages & Linguistics department at my university. That being said, while I enjoy teaching, Spanish isn't the subject I'd like to teach, and isn't particularly connected to my thesis. As such, I spend hours researching (both the language, cultural components and teaching practices), lecturing and advising students in addition to conducting my own research and working a second job. I also pick up side work, as currently I'm barely breaking even financially. My contract states that I am to work approximately 20 hours per week on the behalf of my assistantship, but the reality is that teaching a college course isn't so easily compartmentalized into certain blocks of time. I have an immense amount of passion for teaching and researching, but I fear that this seemingly endless cycle of work and desperation will lead me to burn out.

Members of the committee: I really, truly like my job. I aspire to work in academia permanently, and to help amplify the voices of marginalized students (and their communities). With that in mind, achieving such a goal would be far more effective if I didn't have to worry about having enough money to pay rent, being receptive towards my students' emotional, physical and environmental needs and contending with the increasing oversaturation of academia and exploitation of its benefactors. Collective bargaining lessens this load and protects employees from being used up and thrown away by dispassionate institutions. It is a fundamental right that can and certainly will lead to the betterment of our communities, especially in a sphere that is so vital to the development of our society. I therefore call for a favorable report to 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.