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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

Testimony: HB 493, Collective Bargaining – Faculty, Part–Time Faculty, Post-Doctoral Associates, and Graduate Assistants

Committee: Appropriations

Hearing Date: February 13, 2024

Position: FAV

HB 493 extends collective bargaining rights to full-time and part-time faculty, plus graduate assistants and post-doctoral associates who work at the University System of Maryland, as well as at Morgan State and St. Mary's College of Maryland. These academic workers are the only significant group of state employees who are prohibited from having a union contract.

You'll recall that in 2021, the legislature voted to allow collective bargaining for professors and other academic workers at Maryland's community colleges. That law fully takes effect this year. There's no reason for faculty and other academic workers at Maryland's 4-year public colleges and universities not to enjoy the same rights as their counterparts at community colleges. In fact, some part-time faculty teaching at our community colleges teach the same courses at our 4-year schools.

Meanwhile, graduate workers in the UMD system have been advocating for the right to bargain for more than 22 years. It's past time to allow them -- most of whom earn far less than Maryland's livable wage -- the right to bargain over their wages, hours and working conditions.

Graduate assistants at Johns-Hopkins University already have union representation and are on the verge of reaching agreement on a collective bargaining agreement. If collective bargaining rights are good enough for Johns-Hopkins grad assistants, they are good enough for grad assistants at UMD.

Likewise, several Maryland private colleges and universities have collective bargaining rights for full-time or part-time faculty, including Goucher College, McDaniel College, the Maryland Institute College of Art, as well as Johns-Hopkins. Nationwide, 24 states have laws that allow professors at 4-year academic institutions to collectively bargain, including Delaware, Virginia,

Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and even Ohio. It's no wonder thousands of full-time and part-time faculties are organizing across the country.

The numbers for graduate assistants with collective bargaining are even more overwhelming, with 124 four-year college and universities across the country recognizing bargaining rights for grad assistants. And they are in most of the 50 states, including in several states south of the Mason-Dixon line. The list includes private as well as public universities. Of that group, 74 already have collective bargaining agreements in place.

Eleven 'Big 10' schools have recognized and/or bargained contracts with unions representing their graduate student workers. They include Rutgers, Michigan State, Purdue, Northwestern, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and several others. For a more complete list of US colleges and universities where graduate assistants have collective bargaining rights, I refer you to the list attached to this testimony.

We are all aware of the increasing threat to higher education and academic professions. Without collective bargaining, academic workers in our UMD System don't have the protections they need to speak freely and teach the truth without concern for what political backlash will do to their academic freedom, their research, and their livelihood.

UMD Administrators will likely tell you that there are already systems in place to address the concerns of faculty and grad assistants. But so-called "shared governance" bodies, such as faculty or university senates, or meet-and-confer procedures are merely advisory and informative. They do not give academic workers a legal or binding mechanism to enforce agreements or grievance resolutions. Only collective bargaining can do that.

I also refer you to the FAVORABLE testimony submitted by former Associate Dean Shanna Pearson-Markowitz. She describes in detail how important collective bargaining is for academic workers. It decreases interracial and gender inequality and improves shared governance, core expenses and student completion rates. And she has the empirical data to back it up.

I've told you what this bill will do for academic workers at our public 4-year colleges and universities. What it will not do, is force them to join a union. This is enabling legislation only. Having collective bargaining rights merely gives workers the RIGHT to select a union to represent them if they so choose. Unionization will occur only if more than half of the workers in a bargaining unit officially sign cards or otherwise indicate they want a union to represent them.

If you care about democracy, then you know that collective bargaining ensures democracy in the workplace. And democracy through collective bargaining ensures fairness in the workplace. All workers in the UMD system deserve a fair, equitable and safe workplace.

Therefore, I urge a FAVORABLE report on HB 493.