

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Katherine Wasdin, Associate Professor
SB0823**

**State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate Assistants
March 7, 2024
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Katherine Wasdin and I am an associate professor of Classics at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for 4 and a half years. 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.

At UMD, I conduct research and teach both large (c. 35-180 person) undergraduate courses in topics such as Greek Mythology and smaller (c. 5-12 person) advanced courses in Latin literature. As part of my larger classes, I work alongside graduate teaching assistants in my program. One of the reasons I support this bill is that I feel that my assistants are employees and should have a right to collective bargaining. Far from creating a barrier between us, I believe that graduate student representation would clarify our relationship and allow my assistants to fully appreciate their role as co-workers. They are also laughably underpaid, especially given the high cost of living in the greater DC area. This can lead to living conditions which undercut their purpose for being at UMD. During the pandemic, for example, two of our students lived together in cheap and unsafe housing and had a difficult time breaking their lease to find an affordable and appropriate place to live. This took away from their abilities to perform their tasks as TAs and students. Graduate student workers deserve to be paid enough to focus on their studies and TA-ships in a supportive environment.

I also strongly support this bill because it could provide collective bargaining for faculty, both tenured and non-tenured. My colleagues and I are not paid enough to account for the relatively high cost of living. When we hired a new colleague in our department, the most challenging part of the interviews was when candidates asked about housing options in the area. We struggled to honestly describe the options available based on the salary we offer, and were worried about losing candidates to schools who could pay more. This is especially true for my colleagues who are not on the tenure-line and receive even lower salaries, even though they teach much higher course-loads. While my department would like to pay our PTK (Professional track/non-tenured) members more, we are constricted by the budget amounts given to us by the College and University. Collective bargaining rights would allow their salary to reflect the high levels of teaching and student support that they perform. Finally, collective bargaining would also increase the shared governance at UMD. Currently, this is performed through the University Senate, which can provide some space for discussion, but which serves primarily as a rubber-stamp or advisory body, in my experience, without full powers to set the university's agenda or respond to issues such as overspending on sports or administrative salaries. Recently, the administration almost implemented a review process for out-of-state faculty without senate approval, something that should not be possible and would be prevented with the protection of collective bargaining.

I therefore urge the members of the committee to support SB 247. Collective bargaining rights already protect community college employees and workers, both faculty and graduate students, at many of our peer institutions in the Big Ten. These institutions are arguably stronger for this, and workers in the University System of Maryland should have the same protections. I again 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 info@umdgradworkers.org or umdaaup@gmail.com if you have any questions.*