

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Katherine O'Neill, Senior Lecturer
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 O'Neill and I am a Senior Lecturer in the English Department at University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for 9 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.

I teach in the Professional Writing Program, which teaches students how to write at work. These students are juniors and seniors. This involves understanding the audience, what information they need to make a decision. Mostly I teach Science Writing, but I have taught Technical Writing and Writing for the Healthcare Professions. I teach 3 courses a semester, but over the course of the 9 years, I sometimes teach 4 courses. These courses are capped at 19 students, because the students produce 35 pages of writing each semester, and they have drafts and revisions. I wouldn't be able to read and make comments on the drafts if I had any more students than 19.

While I teach in the English Department, I am a scientist, like most people who teach Science Writing. I have a Ph.D. in Neuroscience, and I have worked as a bench scientist for a pharmaceutical company and have written journal articles. During my career, I have written all of the documents that I teach. I also got a grant from the University of Maryland 2 years ago to create a specific Science Writing course for chemistry majors.

I taught Human Development in the Psychology Department at Howard County College for 5 years from 2014 to 2019.

I make extensive comments on the students' drafts. I am not one of those teachers who writes "awkward phrasing". I don't think students know what to do with that feedback. I tell them how to improve the sentence. So I spend a lot of time making comments. Based on the feedback for 9 years of teaching, the students' appreciate the feedback. This is from a course evaluation: "Dr.O'Neill always gave in-depth feedback after we turned in the rough drafts for assignments., I really appreciated the time that she took to read through our papers and give comments. I thought that it really drove the points home on what I needed to work on from what she went over in class and directly showed how I could improve. She made sure to directly point out what issues there were, and it made it easier to understand what I was doing wrong and fix those mistakes."

I have a lot of students who are applying to medical school or vet school, or graduate school. In any given semester, I probably have 2 to 3 people from each class who ask me to write a letter of recommendation for them for professional school application or grad school application. I take these letters of recommendation very seriously. I spend a lot of time on letters of recommendation because I know it will impact the student's future.

I update my course every semester. I look through the readings, assignments, instructions for assignments, sample documents, etc.

Collective bargaining is the negotiation between employers and employees to create an agreement about the employees' working conditions and salary. Non-tenure-track faculty make up 71 percent of faculty in US universities and colleges, 20 % are full time and 51% are part time and include research, teaching, professional and clinical faculty based on US Dept. of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS, 2021). The number of tenure track positions is shrinking. My son has several friends that have PhD's, and they cannot find tenure track positions. This should concern all of us. Do we want to discourage people from going to graduate school? If they can't get jobs at livable wages, people are not going to go to grad school. Foreign students come to the US to get a college degree or to go to grad school. The universities and colleges in the US are considered the best in the world. But the shrinking of tenure track positions threatens that idea. I teach 3 courses per semester, and I get paid \$7319.46 for each course. That is not a livable wage.

Members of the Committee, this state has for decades viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as the best way to promote democracy in our workplaces and public institutions. The right to collective bargaining has long been recognized as not only a fundamental human right, but also as the best method of ensuring that employee voices play a vital role in constructing conditions that govern our workplaces. It is a right granted to many other public higher ed institutions in the nation, and indeed to many private, prestigious institutions in our own state. The reasons to exempt four-year public higher ed institutions from this path make no sense. 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.*