

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Eli Mizrachi, PhD Candidate
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 Eli Mizrachi and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Maryland at College Park in the Department of Physics, where I have worked for over 6 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.

For the past four years I have been working as a graduate research assistant. While I am paid to work 20 hours per week on tasks that might not be relevant to my dissertation, any graduate researcher--including me--could tell you that the idea of finishing a dissertation in 20 more unpaid hours per week is laughable. An additional 40 might be considered "reasonable" in academia but I couldn't actually tell you because unlike other workers in academia, graduate researchers do not have a timesheet to track hours spent on a project. That is not to say a timesheet would remedy this problem: in conversations with other postdoctoral and professional researchers, "normalizing" a timesheet is a widely acknowledged practice. This entails scaling down hours reported to avoid exceeding budgets. Unlike in some industries where it is common practice to inflate hours worked, in ours it is an open secret that you are expected to do the opposite. As students, our time is routinely stolen from us under the guise of "receiving an education", but this example should help dispel the myth that only students are subject to a culture that enforces these grossly unfair labor practices.

I support this bill, because we need change to come from the top in order to address systemic issues like these. We need enforceable contracts, and healthy boundaries--not unspoken rules and empty promises that abuse our goodwill. At a time when higher education is under attack in states like Florida, the University should be willing to engage in good-faith bargaining efforts instead of weakening their own position in the political zeitgeist.

To the Members of the Committee, my time as a graduate student is coming to a close. As someone who is now considering postdoctoral positions in academia, one of my top priorities to consider is whether I will have a union that represents my interests. Across the nation and in this state, I have a wealth of choices as other institutions of higher education--both public and private--have unionized research workforces. The University of Maryland is not among those choices, in part because of the issue that this bill seeks to rectify. I urge you to support this bill to support the University of Maryland system, and ensure it can continue to recruit a diverse and talented workforce.

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.