

**Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Robert Birt, PhD**

SB 823

**State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate
Assistants**

March 06, 2024

FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, Members of the Senate. My name is Robert Birt and I am professor of philosophy at Bowie State University (BSU) where I have been teaching full time since 2008. I am also President of the BSU chapter of the AAUP. I urge this committee to issue a favorable report for SB 823. The right to collectively bargain in this state applies to most state employees, including faculty at community colleges. There are good reasons why this right should also be extended to all faculty labor in higher education in Maryland. My call for granting collective bargaining rights to higher education workers is based on the need to strengthen shared governance and dignify the labor of all instructors, including part-time faculty.

The principles of shared governance and academic freedom, which are informed by AAUP policy, are a part of the bylaws of the University System of Maryland as well as faculty handbooks across the state. They allot primary responsibility to faculty in academic matters such as the content of courses; the hiring, evaluation, and promotion of faculty; and program development.

These are good policies. But for such policies and principles to be good in reality as well as on paper, the right to collective bargaining is essential. Without that right faculty do not have effective means to prevent the erosion of shared governance and academic freedom, which are then dependent upon the good will of administration—a good will which isn't always guaranteed to be present.

There have been occasions at BSU, when administration refused to recognize the elected members of the faculty senate or appointed advisory committees that circumvented shared governance bodies and procedures. In 2010, flagrant abuses by a newly appointed provost led to severe tensions and even open opposition with the faculty.

And since the recent pandemic, and subsequent increase in virtual classrooms, academic departments and faculty have lost considerable control over course content and pedagogy. Collective bargaining can help create a balance between the need for academic freedom and administrative oversight.

I urge a favorable report on SB 823 for all the reasons listed above.