

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland Senate Finance Committee**

**By Sathvik Nair, PhD student**

**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 Sathvik Nair and I am a PhD student at the University of Maryland, College Park where I have worked for 1 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.

I have been teaching one course a semester, which involves teaching sections, preparing materials, hosting office hours, grading, and interacting with student requests. I understand that this is important to the university and people of Maryland, but I spend upwards of 10 hours a week on these tasks, and there is no guarantee that the course I teach is even tangentially relevant to the research I will do for my dissertation. I have also worked as a Software Development Engineer at a large technology company. Much of my current day-to-day work involves similar responsibilities (writing code, designing software, writing about it, working with technical and non-technical stakeholders, just to name a few). I am also supervising two undergraduate research assistants on projects, which I did not do in my previous role. In my work, I also provide them with code reviews and mentorship as researchers, which is by no means required for my dissertation work. I have also been facilitating engagement with high school students in Maryland, such as hosting the North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad. I have also been compensated for providing demonstrations and explanations on the use of Large Language Models, both within and outside the university, and have had to use this money for living expenses. Simply being paid as a research or teaching assistant does not compensate all the service I provide for both my field and the university.

As academia is notorious for its long hours and culture of overwork, it is important for me and others to have appropriate legal resources to turn to, especially since I am a person of color. Allowing faculty and students to have a voice in what happens to their departments will be critical, especially in a time of budget cuts and layoffs. Many of these layoffs are due to the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence technologies. Maryland has a strong program in AI research, and these researchers, including myself, will have a platform to voice our concerns with these technologies. I left my home state to pursue a degree at UMD and was extremely pleased by my stipend, but that has come with the price of losing my right to collective bargaining. Additionally, my colleagues are paid thousands of dollars less than me, simply because they do not have an affiliation with UMIACS, which is very well funded. I barely make enough to live in this expensive area, and will not tolerate the fact that my colleagues who do similar work are on what are practically starvation wages, and do not often know about where their funding is coming from.

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,

Sathvik Nair, PhD student  
Linguistics & Institute for Advanced Computer Studies  
University of Maryland, College Park  
7901 Regents Drive, College Park, MD 20740  
sathviknair12@gmail.com

*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](mailto:info@umdgradworkers.org) or [umdaaup@gmail.com](mailto:umdaaup@gmail.com) if you have any questions.*