

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Hannah Zafar, Graduate Research Assistant
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 Hannah Zafar and I am a Graduate Student & Researcher at University of Maryland College Park, where I have worked for nearly two 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.

As a graduate student, I am an active participant in the teaching and research at my university. I served as a Teaching Assistant (TAs) for several semesters in my Department, where TAs run weekly course recitations (a supplement to the professor's lecture for review and projects) and serve as sole instructors for the course laboratory, which is an independently-listed course from the lecture. The weekly recitations included reviewing lecture content, distributing project assignments, and grading/evaluation of student papers and presentations. In the laboratory, I was responsible for all instruction, weekly lab assignments, and grading. In total, I instructed nearly 90 students, with almost no training or preparation. Notably, I performed all of these duties on top of my own graduate course load. I have transitioned from TA to Research Assistant (RA), where I contribute to the cutting-edge research at the University of Maryland and provide invaluable assistance to research faculty. Blatantly, research universities in the United States could not operate without the support of graduate students in course instruction and research. Thus, the right of collective bargaining to this group of workers is essential to maintaining proper working conditions and keeping the system operational.

Despite their essential role at colleges and universities, graduate students are often poorly compensated and expected to work long hours. I struggle to make ends meet with my meager salary that teeters on the poverty line, particularly given the high expenses associated with living nearby a large university where real estate is desirable. More than half of my income goes toward housing from a private landlord a few miles from campus. The University of Maryland has a small graduate student housing complex that is old and highly competitive, and students can be on the waiting list for years. Graduate students need to be close to campus in order to work long hours on campus teaching, meeting with students, and doing research, which comes at a high price point. With collective bargaining, graduate students can effectively communicate these struggles to the University and push for initiatives to expand student housing and increase stipends to meet the high cost of living.

Members of the Committee, based on the circumstances of myself and the many graduate students at my institution I documented above, I implore you to support this Bill. As I have described, graduate students play an invaluable role in the operation of higher education and thus are deserving of the right to collective bargaining. Furthermore, 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. I thank you for your time and consideration.

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).
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