

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

By Gerard Holmes, 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 Gerard Holmes. I am a half-time Lecturer in the English Department at UMCP, where I have worked since 2020. Because I was a graduate student in the Department before that, I have taught for the University since 2016. I am also a half-time Coordinator in the Biology Department, where I am represented by the university's staff union.

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. I find it deeply strange that I am eligible for union membership for one-half of my work at the University, but not for the other half. It is self-evident that this right should be extended to all higher education workers in Maryland.

Union representation is particularly crucial for non-tenured and non-tenure-track faculty. I have the same credentials, and in the classroom I do the same work, as tenured and tenure-track faculty, and yet I am protected by none of the benefits of tenure. My pay per course is considerably less; hence the need to work a second half-time job. In fall 2023, I worked a course overload to help make ends meet, as my daughter was herself beginning college. There is, of course, no guarantee of access to overloads, and as a solution to precarious employment, this is ultimately unsustainable in any case. My students insist on calling me "Professor," although my employment has never carried that title; for the students, experiencing my work in the classroom, I might as well be.

I teach a wide-ranging suite of courses in introductory writing and rhetoric, professional writing, and literature. As such, I encounter students from across the university, and I make every effort to show them that they, too, can learn to read, interpret, and write skillfully. It is most inspiring to see their orientation toward their own abilities change as they develop the capacity to articulate their ideas. Students consistently report, in their end-of-semester evaluations, that their sense of what they are capable of doing, and often their career-plans, have changed as a result of taking my classes. Frequently, two or three years later, they return to ask for recommendations to graduate programs or jobs. I wrote two such recommendations last week. Frankly, responses such as this, which should be encouraging, often have the opposite effect, because the reality is I cannot afford to teach on these terms over the long haul.

I am a believer in unions. My father was a union printer, and the protections he enjoyed made it possible for me to remain in school, and for my family to maintain stable housing and food security when he had the first of a series of heart attacks. When, a few years later, my mother got sick with cancer, he was able to adjust his working life to care for her. My brother became a union organizer after initiating and carrying forward a unionization effort at the mental-healthcare facility where he worked. During my working life, I have been a member of four unions, and experienced the formation of a union three times, starting in high school when the public library in which I was a lowly clerk unionized. So, I have

considerable experience with the benefits and the complications of unions and unionization.

In two of the cases in which I experienced unionization, management supported staff's right to form a union. In one, at a small college in Vermont, where union protections are rare, the administration mounted a costly anti-union effort, arguing that the college could not afford the change. In the end, the union was approved, and - as in the instances when management supported the union - negotiations over working-rules, salaries, and benefits were ultimately simplified and standardized, making the process easier for everyone involved. Nor did the union significantly increase operating costs. Contrary to received opinion, my experience has been that unions streamline the often-byzantine processes by which employees are hired and managed, making everyone's life easier in the long run while increasing equity in pay and working conditions.

There is no good reason for disparity in pay between Lecturers in the English Department and the Biology Department. Faculty, regardless of tenure status or subject area, deserve workplace protections including predictable working conditions and fair pay. Or if there is a reason for disparity between people with the same qualifications and work experience, or for insecurity for some but not others, let us have that conversation out in the open. Ultimately, the administration of these higher-education institutions would certainly have ample opportunity to make their case, and faculty would decide to accept or reject the union. In the classroom, my job is to educate students about subjects I know well, and to support them as they encounter obstacles to that education. Students believe I do that job well. I simply ask you for the opportunity to join with my peers in seeking an appropriate level of pay and protections, which will allow me to keep doing so.

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 education institutions in the nation, and indeed to many prestigious private institutions in our own state. There is no good reason to exempt faculty at four-year public higher ed institutions from this path; or if there is, let the institutions make that case before their employees and the National Labor Relations Board, like any other large employer. I again therefore call for a favorable report to this Bill. Thank you very much for reading this.

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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