

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Paula Nicole King, Associate Professor
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 Nicole King and I am an associate professor in the Department of American Studies at UMBC, where I have worked for 18 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.

When I started as a graduate student working on my Ph.D. in American Studies in 2001 at the University of Maryland, College Park, I taught various undergraduate courses that sustained my department and the university. My stipend was \$12,000 with tuition remission. I had to take out loans to pay my rent and afford to live in the D.C. metro area. Once I saw the overlooked but important work of graduate students and lecturers at UMCP, I joined Graduates, Adjuncts, and Lectures Organized Labor (GALOL). We were affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) at the time. While teaching and doing research, I learned about organizing and spent many evenings and weekends talking with my fellow graduate students about our right to organize and how it would directly improve our lives. I co-chaired GALOL from 2002 - 2004 and learned more about the real importance for labor organizing and workers rights in higher education across the nation. After the five years of funding for my assistantship, I taught at Towson and UMBC as an adjunct for wages lower than \$3,000 per class. I had to pay high rates on COBRA not to lose my health benefits. This was a terrible financial situation that I could not have survived if I was not married and living in a two-income house at the time. When I started at UMCP in 2001 the GA stipend was \$12K. That is what GAs at Morgan State University make today, which is poverty wages.

In 2008, I was lucky to be hired as an assistant professor at UMBC right after finishing my P.D. but my salary was only \$56,000. As I received tenure, I noticed an extreme compression of wages-new faculty coming in making more than those of us who had been loyal employees for many years. Nothing in our faculty senate addressed these issues. They were addressed on an individual basis or by taking all the time to get another job and retention offers for jobs no one really intended to take-another problem of the lack of voice in our working conditions. This causes USM to lose many excellent workers to other states with unionized faculty.

Finally, as chair of my department from 2015-2022, I saw the economics of how adjunct and contingent faculty make the institutions of higher education work without anything near fair compensation. Furthermore, as co-chair of the Committee on Departments, Programs, and Center with the American Studies Association (ASA), I saw how unionized faculty and graduate students at peer institutions had far better working conditions than non-union workers at USM. If USM wants to compete on a national and a global scale, we must offer the right to organize to staff, faculty, and graduate students. It is shameful that I've been in this fight for over 20 years and we have not achieved this basic right. It is time to make a change. All state employees deserve the right to collective bargaining and to have a say in

our working conditions. The student experience, equity in higher ed, and the quality of our institutions will benefit. This is especially important as other states (and potentially our own one day) are engaged in deeply unfair and conservative battles to dismantle public higher education.

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,

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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.*