

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

**By Matthew Thomas Miller, Assistant Professor of Persian Literature and Digital Humanities
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 Matthew Thomas Miller, Assistant Professor of Persian Literature and Digital Humanities at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked in this role for 5 years. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to HB0493 and SB0823.

I am an educator and researcher working at the nexus of Islamic, Persian, and literary studies and digital humanities. I teach brilliant students at UMD-CP in courses on topics ranging from Sufi poetry and Iranian cinema to gender and sexuality in the Islamic world and digital approaches to the study of culture. Teaching is a passion of mine, but I also am a dedicated researcher, publishing widely in my first few years here and bringing in over \$3 million dollars in grants in the last four years alone.

I support the right to collectively bargain because I am deeply concerned about the health of our university system, both at the national and University System of Maryland (USM) levels. Speaking specifically to my own USM institution situation, UMD-CP, which we have studied in depth, how can a university remain a healthy, enriching workplace that provides the state of Maryland with world-leading research and educational outcomes when:

The fastest rising categories of spending are not the central missions of the university, i.e., to research and educate, but rather the categories dedicated to expanding the top ranks of the university administrative structure.

* Salaries for our faculty (even those who received COLA and merit raises), after adjusted for inflation, actually decreased by 4% between FY 2010-2022.

Top administrators in the academic and athletic divisions of UMD-CP, who regularly make more than \$300,000 per year, increase their own salaries and number of support staff while telling the faculty and graduate students that "there is no money" for real salary increases, new permanent faculty positions, or professional development funds.

*The administration is allowed to substantially raise its revenues through increasing student enrollment and tuition but then turn around and push more of the institution's teaching responsibilities onto its lowest paid and most precariously employed educators (graduate students and contingent faculty), effectively turning the job of teaching UMD-CP's students into a gig job with the corresponding poverty level of wages.

*The administration permits almost no faculty oversight of its financial decisions (showing clearly the myth of "faculty governance"), allowing it to do outrageous things, such as charging all students hundreds of dollars in mandatory fees every year that are nothing more than a subsidy for the athletics program. This accounting trick of calling a mandatory student fee a "revenue" stream for the athletics program took nearly \$132.5 million from the pockets of Maryland students and parents between 2013-2020 and it continues until today.

These same trends can be seen at the USM level more broadly where instructional faculty are paid as little as \$2,100 per course (which equals ~\$14/hr for these instructors with the highest professional degree possible, a PhD) and cost of living-adjusted salaries at many USM institutions are among the lowest when compared to peer institutions.

What these data show clearly is that, while perhaps well intentioned, university administrators are increasingly turning USM institutions into big businesses. Collective bargaining for faculty and graduate students can aid in checking this administrative overreach and help return USM institutions to their core mission of providing high quality education and innovative research to the state of Maryland. We are educators. We care the most about the quality of education students are receiving and we know what we need best to provide Maryland students with the best education possible. We are researchers. We know what we need to do the best research. Let us advocate for ourselves and our students. Let us help refocus USM institutions and make them the best educational and research institutions possible.

Members of the committee, this state has for decades viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as the best way to enroot democracy in our workplaces and public education institutions. The right to collective bargaining has been long recognized not only as a fundamental human right, but it has also in this state been seen 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 county, and indeed to many private, prestigious institutions in our own state. The reasons to exempt 4-year public institutions from this path just no longer make sense. I again therefore call for a favorable report to HB0493 and SB0823.

Sincerely,

Matthew Thomas Miller, Assistant Professor of Persian Literature and Digital Humanities
School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures
University of Maryland, College Park
7901 Regents Drive, College Park, MD 20740
mtmiller@umd.edu

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.