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Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the House Appropriations Committee
HB0661- State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty
By Conor J. Donnan

Good afternoon, Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of HB0661. My name is Conor Donnan, and I am a non-tenure track faculty member at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). I teach in the American Studies department, where I engage in rigorous scholarship, mentor students, and represent UMBC in public discussions on critical issues in American history and culture.

Each year, I teach between 200 and 250 students in courses such as *American Nonviolent Social Movements* and *Indigenous Heritage*. My responsibilities extend far beyond the classroom: I meet with students during office hours, advise campus organizations, mentor graduate students, serve on faculty committees, and contribute to Baltimore County's Commission for Arts and Humanities. My work directly strengthens UMBC's reputation, boosts student enrollment, and elevates Maryland's public higher education system. Yet, despite this significant commitment, I—along with my colleagues—am denied the fundamental right to unionize and collectively bargain.

This is not just an issue of fairness; it is an issue of Maryland's ability to recruit and retain top-tier faculty. Maryland is one of the few states where public university faculty lack collective bargaining rights. Meanwhile, in 25 states and the District of Columbia—including neighboring Pennsylvania and Delaware—faculty have secured this right, leading to higher wages, greater workplace stability, and better educational outcomes. In Pennsylvania, non-tenure track faculty earn 12-15% more than their counterparts in Maryland. In some unionized states, that gap is as high as 20%. This disparity weakens Maryland's ability to attract and retain talented faculty who are essential to the success of our students and institutions.

Maryland's public universities risk falling behind. Faculty—especially those without the protections of tenure—face increasing precarity. Many are forced to seek better pay and stability elsewhere, depriving students of dedicated educators and disrupting academic continuity. If Maryland truly values its students and its higher education system, it must ensure that faculty can collectively bargain to secure fair compensation, job security, and the ability to advocate for the best interests of the university community.

Some argue that “shared governance” provides faculty with a voice in university affairs. However, as someone who serves on the UMBC Faculty Affairs Committee, I can attest that shared governance is fundamentally limited. Faculty may propose policies, but administrators retain the power to reject them without consequence. A prime example is the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD) Senate's Budget Committee, which was created during the COVID-19 pandemic but rendered ineffective because the administration refused to provide the necessary data. Similarly, both UMD and UMBC administrations unilaterally imposed interim policies on expressive activity without significant faculty input. This is not

governance—it is a symbolic gesture that ultimately silences faculty voices. Without collective bargaining, we remain powerless in critical decisions that shape our working conditions, students' learning environments, and the future of Maryland's higher education system.

Maryland has a proud labor history, and your committee should embrace it. From the founding of the National Labor Union in Baltimore in 1866 to the establishment of teachers' unions over 150 years ago, this state has been a leader in advancing workers' rights. Today, unions such as the Baltimore Teachers Union continue to hold power to account, advocating tirelessly for their workers and ensuring that educators receive the pay, protections, and respect they deserve. Yet, public university faculty remain among the few state employees without collective bargaining rights. This is a direct contradiction to Maryland's labor legacy and a disservice to those educating the next generation of leaders, innovators, and public servants.

The urgency of this issue cannot be overstated. In 2025, as public universities face increasing political and financial pressures, faculty must be empowered to advocate for themselves and their students. Without the protections of collective bargaining, faculty remain vulnerable to external pressures that can undermine academic freedom, erode workplace stability, and diminish the quality of education. The consequences extend beyond faculty members—students suffer when their instructors lack job security, fair pay, and a voice in university policies.

Passing HB0661 is not just about protecting faculty; it is an investment in Maryland's future. Strong universities drive economic development, innovation, and social mobility. When faculty are respected, supported, and fairly compensated, students receive a better education, research flourishes, and Maryland's public universities remain competitive on a national scale.

It is time to correct this injustice. Faculty at Maryland's public universities deserve the same rights as their colleagues in other states and the same rights as nearly every other public employee in Maryland. Collective bargaining is not a privilege—it is a human right that strengthens institutions, protects workers, enhances workplace democracy, and improves student outcomes.

I urge this committee to pass HB0661 and ensure that faculty at UMBC and across Maryland's public universities can collectively bargain. Doing so will strengthen Maryland's higher education system, secure its reputation as a leader in academic excellence, and create a more equitable, transparent, and democratic workplace for all faculty.

Thank you to Chair Delegate Ben Barnes, Vice Chair Delegate Mark Chang, and all members of the Appropriations Committee for your time and consideration. I urge you to support HB0661 and stand with faculty in Maryland's fight for workplace democracy.

Sincerely,

Conor J. Donnan