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Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
By Heather Wyatt-Nichol,

Associate Professor

HB0661
State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty
March 4, 2025
FAVORABLE

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Good afternoon Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee,

My name is Heather Wyatt-Nichol and I am an Associate Professor at the University of Baltimore where I have worked for 16 years. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report on 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.

I left another university in another state to join the University of Baltimore in 2008. I was excited to have the opportunity to move back to the mid-Atlantic region and work with individuals who were renowned and respected in their field. Unfortunately, the Great Recession hit during this same time period, and I ended up being the primary breadwinner for my family for nearly a year as my husband looked for a new job. I quickly learned that my starting salary as an assistant professor was egregiously lower than the salaries of additional faculty members within my own department who were joining at the rank of associate professor. I was also unfamiliar with the experience of being furloughed prior to my arrival in Maryland. I anticipated merit increases each year and not pay reductions via furloughs during my first couple of years here. I was told I should have negotiated a higher salary, however, at my previous institution we brought all assistant professors in at the same pay rate-- salary was non-negotiable. I was told that in order to get a pay raise I would have to go on the market and present the counteroffer to the university. I refused to play a disingenuous game. Over the years, salary compression and inversion became problematic, however, I remained because I believe in the mission of this university and our reputation (backed by rankings) for providing upward mobility to students. I am proud of the work that we do in preparing students for public service. In addition, the Obama years (2008-2016) were exciting times to be working in the field of public administration and public affairs.

In addition, faculty could use stronger due process rights when allegations are brought against them (sometimes they aren't even informed of pending allegations). Several years ago, I was provided 30 days to submit a post-tenure review. Our university has since standardized the process to avoid arbitrary and capricious actions after the fact.

As the state budget is constrained, anticipated cuts within USM also leave some concerned about fairness and transparency in the retrenchment process that will occur across various universities.

Standardized contracts and standardized processes to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability are best achieved through collective bargaining rights.

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 United Academics of Maryland.