

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland House Appropriations Committee  
By Rianna Walcott, Assistant Professor  
HB0661  
State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty  
March 4, 2025  
FAVORABLE**

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

My name is Rianna Walcott and I am a tenure track Assistant Professor of Communication at the University of Maryland where I have worked for 2.5 years. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report on the House Bill 0661 and Senate 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. Prior to moving to the US education system for my postdoc just over two years ago I was a PhD candidate in the UK, where collective bargaining amongst university faculty - and separately, among students - is a given, through the UK-wide University and College Union (UCU) and the National Union of Students (NUS) respectively. It is clear that this right, that is so commonplace in other higher education systems, should be extended to all higher ed workers in Maryland.

I am a new Assistant Professor, and prior to this academic year I had a two-year postdoctoral fellowship within the same department. I am now contracted to teach 2 classes per semester, usually with between 15-30 students. I also have some course buyouts at this time from a grant I work on, so this year I have been on a 1-1 while I co-direct a lab that is committed to providing extensive programming; mentoring and leading a team of 3 graduate and 2 undergraduate students; and leading inter-institutional collaborative research outputs. I feel fortunate, if overworked, in my job, and bewildered by the clear inequities I see between the resources, workload, and security afforded to tenure track versus professional track faculty.

I also note that at the present moment I feel particularly vulnerable in exercising my 'freedom of academic speech' as a member of faculty on an immigrant visa, and collective bargaining feels all the more critical to collectively and safely challenge attacks on higher education and research standards. For precarious or contingent staff, inclusive of our graduate students, professional track faculty and librarians, collective bargaining allows for us to seek equitable conditions in our employ on issues such as job security, workload policies, and service expectations. Shared governance is no substitute for collective bargaining - the former does not guarantee representation in matters that impact university faculty, whereas the latter more fairly supports an independent, collective voice.

Members of the Committee, This state has long recognized collective bargaining as essential for workplace democracy. This fundamental right ensures employee voices shape their working conditions; is already granted to many private institutions in our state; and to comparable higher education institutions nationally and internationally. Exempting four-year public institutions from this is illogical. I urge a favorable report on this Bill.

Sincerely,

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*This testimony has been submitted on behalf of this individual by the United Academics of Maryland.*