

Testimony In Support of University Faculty Collective Bargaining Bill, HB 661

House Appropriations Committee

March 4, 2025

My name is Dr. Donna J. Satterlee, I was a tenured associate professor at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore for the last 22 ½ years in the Department of Human Ecology, School of Agricultural and Natural Sciences. Teaching at UMES was difficult. The idea of shared governance is just that, an idea. On the UMES campus Shared Governance is an advisory board, and the recommendations are ignored. For faculty, academic freedom is ignored. People get targeted for having a different idea than the chairs.

Furthermore, I have known at least two people that had applied for positions off campus, who were then actively persecuted, and basically forced to resign, even though they had chosen to stay with UMES. The word on the street was that they were not loyal to the university, and that if they were not good enough for the off campus job, they were not good enough for the university.

Therefore, I stand before you to present my testimony in fervent support of Senate Bill 750 and House Bill 661, which aim to grant four-year college faculty in Maryland the right to unionize. This legislation is a significant step towards ensuring fair labor practices, fostering a collaborative academic environment, and upholding the values of equity and justice within the higher education sector.

I had between 7 and 15 students in each of my classes, a few of which were joining the course online, as well as advising the non-traditional students who were off campus. I had to accommodate the non-traditional students on-line while I was teaching my traditional students in class.

Bargaining would have helped me develop the fully online program for my child development students much sooner (it finally began in fall, 2025 as 8 week courses, which does not help with fewer weekends available for doing homework) and I had asked my chair, Dr. Grace Namwamba, if I could develop the program 9 years ago, since the assistant state superintendent of Early Childhood, Steven Hicks, had asked me to do so, since we were working on the BluePrint for Early Childhood and we needed to increase the education level of the teachers in child care settings. Instead, I was targeted by the chair for daring to support the second cohort of students who had to bring in a senator so that the department would allow the students to graduate on the course catalog that they matriculated on, which is the law. I had no ombudsman, nor could I report that to anyone

at the time, since there was nowhere to report the many incidences of bullying and racism toward me. For example, I was given short deadlines for paperwork. I was told to teach a new class to me, HUEC 474, Research Methodologies with 2 days notice. I was given bad faculty evaluations for advising some students that the chair sent to me for advising. My advising was fine, and the students were grateful when I found errors in their advisement requirements that were done by the chair. I had to locate articulation agreements with Wor-Wic and Chesapeake College that sat on the chairs desk for months. The Wor-Wic articulation took 15 years to become signed, Chesapeake College was done in only 10 years. There was no reason for the delay. I was given extra work randomly, when I was most busy. Having articulation agreements makes advising much easier, and when the Wor-Wic articulation was finally signed, I was not notified that it was in effect.

We need to reverse the attacks on faculty by having the possibility of bargaining. I was known on campus for supporting the students and I received a student choice award for doing so. Having a chair that could have been supportive for me, I would have been able to have many more students get a four-year degree much sooner, since there was a grant (CCCPDF) that I ran from the state that supported the child care teachers with books, tuition and college fees. I brought in over 1 ½ million dollars into the college from the state CCCPDF grant. Yet I was unable to advertise our program, nor was I able to even be allowed to discuss the possibilities of online courses before the pandemic hit. The technology was developed enough to make it happen. I could not get support from the college for my possible future students to increase their level of education by putting the program online. The state was willing to give the college a grant to deliver the child development online, and I was not allowed to accept the money that would have done the needed feasibility report or for the work to transform the classes into a completely online format 9 years ago. The online program finally started in fall 2024 and was paid for by a settlement with the state for inequities in funding.

The Importance of Faculty Unionization

Unionization among faculty members in four-year colleges is critical for several reasons. First and foremost, it empowers educators to have a collective voice in negotiating their terms of employment, including salaries, benefits, and working conditions. This empowerment is fundamental to ensuring that faculty members can focus on their primary mission: educating and mentoring students.

Furthermore, faculty unions can play a pivotal role in advocating for better resources for teaching and research, thus enhancing the overall quality of education. When faculty members have a platform to express their concerns and suggestions, it leads to a more dynamic and responsive academic environment.

Addressing Inequities and Ensuring Fair Compensation

One of the most compelling arguments for allowing faculty unionization is the need to address inequities in compensation and working conditions. Currently, disparities exist not only between faculty members within the same institution but also across different institutions within the state. Unionization provides a mechanism for standardizing compensation packages, ensuring that all faculty members receive fair pay and benefits commensurate with their qualifications and experience.

Moreover, unions can advocate for adjunct and part-time faculty members, who often face precarious employment conditions and lack access to essential benefits. By extending union protections to all faculty members, we can create a more inclusive and equitable academic community.

Enhancing Academic Freedom and Shared Governance

Academic freedom is the cornerstone of higher education, allowing faculty members to pursue innovative research and teach controversial subjects without fear of retribution. Unionization strengthens academic freedom by providing a structured process for addressing grievances and protecting faculty members from unjust dismissal or punitive actions.

In addition, faculty unions can promote shared governance, ensuring that educators have a meaningful role in institutional decision-making processes. This collaborative approach fosters transparency, accountability, and a sense of ownership among faculty members, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable policies.

Supporting Student Success

The benefits of faculty unionization extend beyond the faculty members themselves; they also positively impact students. When faculty members have stable and fair working conditions, they are better equipped to dedicate their time and energy to teaching, advising, and mentoring students. This, in turn, enhances the overall student experience and contributes to higher retention and graduation rates.

Furthermore, faculty unions can advocate for policies that prioritize student needs, such as smaller class sizes, improved facilities, and increased funding for academic programs. By working together, faculty and administrators can create an environment that supports student success and fosters a culture of excellence.

For example, my classroom in 1142 ECRC had a sticky, dirty floor from uncured tile adhesive, after the last flood that flooded my classroom and my office. There was a broken, stained projector screen, and the noisy heating and air conditioning unit made

nearly impossible for my impaired student to hear me, and a projector that did not project with enough light to compete with late afternoon sunshine. I had put in complaints, but it was not until I took a picture of a student's glue on her boots that anything improved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, passing Senate Bill 750 and House Bill 661 to allow four-year college faculty in Maryland to join a union is a vital step towards promoting fairness, equity, and excellence in higher education. By granting faculty members the right to unionize, we empower them to advocate for their professional needs, enhance the quality of education, and ultimately benefit students and the broader academic community. I urge you to support this legislation and help create a more just and equitable future for higher education in Maryland.

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.

I wish to thank Chairperson Barnes and the full Committee for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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