

Oral Testimony, 20 February 2025

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, Members. I'm Marcus Johnson. I'm an Assistant Professor of Government and Politics at College Park, which means that I do not yet have tenure.

My teaching and my scholarship focus on themes of race, racism, gender and social justice, both in the United States and abroad. As an untenured faculty member teaching, researching and writing grants on these topics, I am made vulnerable by broad assaults on academic freedom. My tenure depends on securing grant funding and publishing research on controversial topics, similar to other USM assistant professors, especially in STEM. The situation is worse still for the non-tenure track faculty (adjuncts, full time lecturers and researchers) whose salaries are 100% federal grant-funded. This funding makes up a third of the revenue at my University, more than a billion dollars across the USM.

Trump and the GOP are not the only threats to academic freedom. At my university, as at Universities across the country, faculty have been impacted by the Palestinian exception to academic freedom. Faculty are advised not to record their lectures, to avoid politically polarizing topics, and even to call campus police if they face interruptions in the classroom. As organizers in the United Academics of Maryland often say, "our working conditions are our students' learning conditions". When our universities fail to defend academic freedom (for fear of political and economic backlash), faculty self-censor, and sadly, we are training our students to do the same.

Faculty unions have been at the forefront of efforts to preserve the critical work that universities do in sustaining democracy. Maryland needs faculty unions to secure vital research and the right of students to learn their history and to think critically. The American Association of University Professors is currently filing lawsuits to defend racial justice and accessibility on our campuses. University administrators, by contrast, are either afraid or have their hands tied.

Under blatant assaults on free speech, including critical speech, we need our unions more than ever. Members of Senate Finance, please act now, and give faculty the tools we need to fight back effectively.