

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee
By Conor Donnan, Lecturer
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 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 offer courses, publish articles in scholarly journals, and appear on podcasts as an expert to discuss a myriad of topics, all as a representative of UMBC.

Each year, I teach 200-250 students in courses such as American Nonviolent Social Movements and Indigenous Heritage. I dedicate considerable time to lecturing, meeting with students during office hours, advising campus organizations, and grading. My work aligns closely with UMBC's mission to produce compassionate, well-rounded graduates who will positively impact the world. Beyond teaching, I advise multiple campus organizations, mentor graduate students, and serve on the Baltimore County Commission for Arts and Humanities. I proudly engage in this work as a member of the UMBC community to further its reputation, increase enrollment, and generate publicity for the institution.

I also contribute to UMBC's research reputation through my scholarship on Irish and Native American interactions during the rise of settler-colonialism and capitalism in the American West. While this research bolsters UMBC's publication record and institutional reputation, it is not officially recognized as part of my workload because I am a non-tenure track faculty member. I receive no compensation for any activity I undertake to further the interests of UMBC other than my work in the classroom, which as the members of this committee can see, is simply a fraction of the work required to maintain my status within UMBC and provide the educational experience students of Maryland's public universities deserve.

I am one voice among a dedicated community of faculty in Maryland who, despite our unwavering commitment to our students and the pursuit of academic excellence, are denied the right to unionize and collectively bargain. The right to collective bargaining is not only a fundamental human right but also a proven means of fostering a democratic, transparent, and fair workplace for all employees. At a time when universities increasingly operate like corporations and donors wield disproportionate influence, this denial further marginalizes faculty, undermining our ability to advocate for ourselves and for the integrity of higher education as a whole.

Faculty at Maryland's public universities are among the few state employees without the right to collectively bargain. This is despite evidence from 25 states and the District of Columbia- including neighboring Delaware and Pennsylvania- that empowering faculty with collective bargaining rights enhances workplace democracy, transparency, and educational outcomes. Faculty in states with collective bargaining agreements typically earn significantly more than their non-unionized peers. For example, non-tenure track faculty in Pennsylvania make 12-15% more than faculty in Maryland do, and in some unionized states, the pay gap is as high as 20%. This presents a very real danger to talent retention upon which UMBC relies for recruitment and educational outcomes.

In fact, talented faculty in the Maryland system are often forced to look for more stable, more robustly compensated opportunities in Pennsylvania and Delaware, which hurts the academic community in Maryland. If the State of Maryland wants to provide the highest quality of education for its students, it needs to join our neighbors in allowing the faculty to collectively bargain, so we can maintain committed, dedicated, and respected experts in their fields. Remaining on unequal footing with the administration prevents faculty from optimizing students' educational experience and advocating for them as the ones interacting with them daily because of the possibility of reprisal.

The denial of collective bargaining stymies open and honest discourse about what is best for the Maryland university system to the detriment of all stakeholders, including the taxpayers of the State of Maryland, who stand to benefit from optimized educational outcomes as students enter the workforce. Research shows that public universities with unionized faculty spend a more significant proportion of their budgets on education rather than administration. This prioritization of student learning leads to higher academic achievements, better retention rates, and improved overall experiences for students. The greater faculty retention and stability allows UMBC's faculty to continue to commit to the university, the students, and the community in a way that transcends classroom instruction. In short, collective bargaining is an investment in the stable future of UMBC through its faculty, resources, student opportunities, successful outcomes, and successful completion of student degrees before entering the workforce and Maryland tax base.

The university system often points to "shared governance" as a substitute for collective bargaining. However, shared governance is fundamentally limited. Faculty senates may propose policies, but university administrations retain the power to overturn them without recourse. I am not personally a member of the Faculty Senate at UMBC, but I do serve on the Faculty Affairs Committee. Unfortunately, our ability to enact meaningful change or effectively advocate for ourselves is severely limited. In fact, it is a frequent point of discussion within our committee that we hold little real power within the shared governance system, leaving us unable to address key issues that directly impact UMBC, faculty, and students, and all other stakeholders. My colleagues at UMD have faced multiple issues with the "shared governance" model. For example, UMD Senate created a Budget Committee during the COVID pandemic but it was never able to function because the University Administration failed to provide needed data. The administration at UMD and UMBC also placed interim Policies on Expressive Activity without major input from faculty. In other words, "shared governance" is like being handed a toolbox without the key--you have the appearance of resources but lack the means to use them effectively. Collective bargaining provides the key to unlock those tools and make meaningful progress. Collective bargaining allows the equal footing required to enact positive change and it promotes workplace democracy, transparency, and accountability.

Importantly, Maryland senators and delegates, labor movements and unions have built this state. Maryland has a rich history of labor activism, from the founding of the National Labor Union in Baltimore in 1866 to the establishment of teachers' unions over 150 years ago. Denying faculty the right to collective bargaining is a departure from this legacy and an affront to the values of fairness and equity that have defined this state. It is time that faculty members take our seat at the table of labor history in Maryland.

In 2025, the current challenges surrounding public university funding, academic freedom, and union rights at the federal level make it more important than ever for Maryland to ensure its faculty--as the direct link with students on a daily basis-- have a voice. Without collective bargaining, especially under the current federal administration, faculty are left exposed to a rapidly changing and uncertain landscape where academics risk facing penalties for engaging in critical research. Students also suffer without collective bargaining as the ability of faculty to meaningfully participate in discussions about social, cultural, and political issues is severely limited and controlled by the administration. As a result, it is easy to envision a scenario where students, the faculty, and the administration are in tension, and

there is no meaningful mechanism to resolve these conflicts. Without the protections and advocacy that collective bargaining provides, faculty are unable to drive meaningful change or fully support students, leaving them vulnerable and without recourse. In today's increasingly uncertain cultural, political, and legal landscape--where federal actions threaten university funding for supporting LGBTQ+ students, immigrants, and people of color--it is more urgent than ever for the State of Maryland to codify the right for professors to collectively bargain. This right ensures that faculty can advocate for and act in solidarity with their students and communities without fear of retaliation, creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all.

Faculty at UMBC and other public universities in Maryland deserve the same rights as almost every other state employee and as faculty in neighboring states. Collective bargaining is a fundamental right that ensures educators can advocate for fair working conditions, fair pay, and better outcomes for students. By passing this bill, you will empower faculty to take an active role in shaping their professional futures, creating stability to allow for growth and investment of individual faculty members both in the university community and the community at large, and ensuring the continued success of Maryland's public universities to the benefit of all stakeholders including the current State taxpayers, and the ones currently being prepared for the workforce in the great public universities of the State of Maryland.

I am confident that the benefits for all stakeholders in codifying a right to collectively bargain will carry the day.

Sincerely,

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