

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee**

By Elizabeth Leininger, Faculty

SB0750

State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty

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FAVORABLE

Good afternoon Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee.

My name is Liz Leininger and I am Associate Professor of Neuroscience at St. Mary's College, where I worked from 2013-2017 and returned to work here again in 2023. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to 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 education workers in Maryland.

I teach introductory to advanced courses in Neuroscience, supervise student honors theses, conduct research and mentor student research assistants, and perform service to support the governance of my college. I take the time to get to know all of my students on a first-name basis. I love the work that I do and the growth and learning I see in my students. But to continue doing high quality work, it is important that (1) my workload and my colleagues' workload is protected and fairly bargained, and (2) that core principles of shared governance and academic freedom are upheld. Unions serve both of these functions. As just one example related to working conditions, unions ensure that overload pay and off-contract pay rates are set and communicated transparently, such that all faculty members are compensated fairly.

I specifically want to discuss the relationship between unions and the process of shared governance. Shared governance means that there is a shared responsibility and process for decision-making amongst university faculty, students, staff, and administration. When shared governance is done well, the university thrives. But shared governance can and does break down, which harms the functioning of the university. As a collective body, unions help ensure that shared governance is followed by providing a clear, transparent means for breakdowns in shared governance to be identified, communicated, and resolved.

I recently moved back to Maryland from Florida. The state government of Florida has brazenly attacked academic freedom, shared governance, and equity on a large scale. These attacks are alarming because academic freedom, shared governance, and equity form the bedrock of independent, strong universities and a thriving democracy. I personally witnessed attacks on these principles at New College of Florida, where I worked -- which is why I moved out of state and found my way back to Maryland.

When I left Florida, I left behind union membership. Yes, Florida has a union for university workers! Via collective bargaining, the United Faculty of Florida helped ensure that educator workloads were bargained fairly and that policies on issues of academic freedom and shared governance were being upheld. When these key principles were not upheld, the United Faculty of Florida union was one of the main bodies that could speak up on behalf of the faculty, allowing us to have a collective voice that benefited everyone. For example, New College's union fought unfair, politically-motivated firings, which had included a breach in performance review policies that were outlined under shared governance.

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.