

Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland Senate
Senate Finance Committee
Faculty Collective Bargaining Bill
SB0750
February 20, 2025

Dear Chairperson Biedle, Vice Chair Hayes and members of the Senate Finance Committee.

My name is Dr. Amanda Dotson. I have been a yearly contractual lecturer at Morgan State University in the Department of Physics and Engineering Physics since 2017. I am working with my colleagues and AFT Maryland to secure collective bargaining rights through SB0750. SB 750 provides the right to engage in collective bargaining, a right that university faculty currently do not have, yet many federal employees, Maryland state employees such as community college faculty, and members of the non-academic workforce at four-year institutions do. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to this Bill.

I am proud to work at Morgan State University and feel like I am a vital part of the campus community through my teaching and work with students outside the classroom as a mentor, informal advisor, and club advisor. My contract is for 12 credits per semester, which typically works out to four courses. For the past four years I have also voluntarily taken on an extra three or four credit "overload" course to help support the department, bringing my course load to 5 courses. During the current semester I am responsible for teaching 17 credits. I teach many core courses in my department: stellar astronomy (which fulfills a physical science credit for non-science majors), Algebra-based physics 1 and 2 (required for biology majors), calculus-based physics 1 and 2 (required for physics, math, engineering, and chemistry majors), and astrophysics (an upper-level elective for physics majors). I hold regular office hours for all classes, where students can come for homework help, clarification on class topics, or just a place to grab a snack (which I pay for out of my own pocket) and focus on any work they need to do. My students are the focus of my job and the driving force behind doing what I do.

In addition to my teaching duties, I am the faculty advisor for two on campus clubs (Astronomy Association and the Crochet Club), and head the department curriculum committee. I also support my department in liaising with adjunct faculty, helping them with getting course materials, set up their Canvas online learning platforms, and being a point of contact who can be easily reached to answer any questions they may have about their courses, responsibilities, or department procedures. I mentor students in their search for summer internships, course selection, and future career planning, and have brought students to networking events. I write between 3 and 5 letters of recommendation for students every semester to help them secure scholarships, research opportunities, and internships. I am a co-writer and investigator on grants being used to begin a Physics Tutorial Center on campus and Physics on the Move program to visit local high schools with interactive programs and increase recruitment of Baltimore City Students into the field of physics.

Despite my vital role within the department teaching core courses required for not only physics, but biology, chemistry, engineering, and math students, the shared governance of the University Council has not been sufficient to address the issues that I and other lecturers and instructors face. We have no way of addressing these issues as a unified voice, as many contractual employees are afraid to speak up individually. Most instructor and lecturer contracts are a 9-month contract that must be reissued on a yearly basis. University administrators have the impression that instructors and lecturers on yearly contracts are transient and lack long-term commitment to the university. This could not be farther from the truth. I have been at Morgan State University for 8 years and this is a short amount of time compared to other faculty members who have been in similar instructor and lecturer positions for over ten years. I am also one of the fortunate lecturers who have access to subsidized health benefits. A large percentage of these instructors and lecturers (again, many who have been at Morgan State for a number of years) do not have this benefit nor others such as retirement. The ability to bargain as a collective will provide us a way to work with administration as a collective to address these issues.

My current nine-month salary is approximately \$51,000. If I were single and did not have a partner who was comfortable with the income inequality between us, I would not be able to afford rent or a mortgage and would struggle to live on my own. Lecturers have no opportunity for career advancement or promotion and no way to collectively request that a process be established. In Morgan State's Faculty Handbook, a non-tenure track position with a contract of up to five years known as "Professor of Practice" is described as reserved for

“individuals who have demonstrated excellence in the practice as well as leadership in specified fields.” This type of role is common in universities such as University of Maryland College Park. Unlike tenure-track appointments, which has requirements for promotion, there is no prescribed process for attaining the position of “Professor of Practice.” Many long-term lecturers fulfill the requirements stated in the faculty handbook for the “Professor of Practice” position, but few have been offered this position. There is no defined process describing who will be offered these positions or how to apply for one, leaving us with no career ladder at an institution we have made our careers. Even those tenure track faculty who have a clearly defined promotion and tenure process have these processes unevenly applied to them. Although this issue has been brought up, the shared governance of the university has not addressed these problems.

I am fortunate in that my current department chair understands the critical role I play in the department and feel confident that I will receive a new contract each year. This, however, is not the same as job security nor is it able to help the other faculty members who may not have the same relationship with their department heads. Many faculty members in similar positions as myself are afraid to speak up to administration about issues of job security, a lack of a career ladder, and lack of adequate benefits and pay. The right to collective bargaining will not immediately cause all universities to unionize; this will be voted on by the faculty of each campus and even on unionized campuses, faculty can decline to join a union. Collective bargaining will not guarantee an exorbitant base salary or benefits; it will provide a way to address administration as a unified collective. Having the right to collective bargaining will give us equal footing with administration and allow us to speak with a unified voice about our needs as lecturers and faculty members, something that is not currently done under shared governance. Students deserve to have instructors that are not overloaded with courses, that feel they have job security, have a reasonable salary and health benefits. When we, the faculty, are supported in this way, we can do a better job of teaching, mentoring, and leading our students. When the faculty are empowered, students will also benefit.

Morgan State fills a vital role within Baltimore City giving students from all walks of life access to a college education. The faculty at Morgan State strive to support the students and aid in graduating future generations of social workers, journalists, teachers, engineers, and scientists. Giving university faculty the right to decide if they want to engage in collective bargaining, a right afforded to almost all other Maryland Public Employees, will give us access to a voice that we currently are exempted from. I support this bill wholeheartedly to support not only the advancement of my own career, in support of being more available to the students and the overall advancement of Morgan State University. Again, I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to this Bill.

Thank you,
Dr. Amanda Dotson
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