

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Harjant Gill, Associate Professor
SB0750**

**State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Faculty
February 20, 2025
FAVORABLE**

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

My name is Harjant Singh Gill and I am an associate professor in the department of Sociology/Anthropology/Criminal Justice at Towson University, where I have worked for 14 years. I am a scholar whose research focuses on gender, caste, race, and other inequities around the world. 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 ed workers in Maryland including faculty at Towson University.

In addition to maintaining an active research agenda - that includes publishing articles in leading peer review journals, applying for competitive grants to support my research, and presenting at international academic conferences and educational settings - I teach nearly 120 undergraduate students every semester, and advise another 40 - 50 students. In addition, I also serve on several university committees and as the head of the anthropology concentration within my department, a position in which my responsibilities including curriculum development, course scheduling, overseeing peer evaluations, and clearing students for graduation. Outside of Towson, I am currently serving on evaluation committees including for Fulbright, American Institute of Indian Studies, Margaret Mead Film Festival, and as the president of Society for Visual Anthropology. I pride myself of being an involved and passionate teacher and endeavoring to transform my students from passive listeners to critically engaged thinkers and social actors. I receive excellent evaluations and take student feedback very seriously.

Over the past 14 years that I have been teaching at Towson University, I have noticed that the university has shifted away from the spirit of "shared governance" and adopted a more top-down hierarchical model. With each new change, new administration, or new initiatives that are introduced, faculty are asked to forgo their agency and comply with the decisions administration is making for us; decisions regarding hiring, teaching/advising load, teaching evaluations, curriculum development, and even timesheets and travel reimbursements. While not all the new initiatives and changes are bad, many are implemented without soliciting faculty feedback - violating the spirit of shared governance. Some of new initiative and guidelines - such as on course evaluations, student retention, and faculty hiring feels quite draconian. They violate the spirit of inclusivity and shared governance that had made Towson University an attractive home for me, as junior scholar 14 years ago. My colleagues and I are often overwhelmed by teaching and research, feel overworked and underpaid (Towson is among the lowest paying universities in the region), and now increasingly we feel under-appreciated as well. I can see that these changes are already having an impact on the university community as the quality of education suffers, and initiative to promote diverse inclusive environments on campus are sidelined for profit and expediency.

Collective bargaining is one of the main ways that faculty can advocate for simple measures that would standardize pay, ensure adequate benefits, protect against employment

discrimination, and improve the ability of workers to focus on our jobs. There are many other reasons that workers need this fundamental right of association to be recognized by the state, but I hope that my brief comments give a sense of the urgency of establishing collective bargaining in order to improve the university and promote well-being among workers across the state. Members of the Committee, Maryland 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.