

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

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Associate Professor**

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 Maria João and I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice at Towson University. I have lived in Maryland for over 20 years now, and am raising all 4 of my children here. I began at Towson as an adjunct professor, teaching at night. I secured a lecturer position in early 2013 and a tenure-track job beginning in August 2015. My experience in different academic roles provides me with a unique perspective on the Bill being proposed. I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to this Bill. The state already grants this right towards nearly every other state employee, as well as the faculty at our community colleges and the non-academic workforce at our 4 year institutions. It is clear that this right should be extended to the rest of higher education in Maryland.

Recently, Towson has made a push to become a Research 2 institution. With this designation comes more opportunities for federal and possible state fundings, but the benefits are not likely to be experienced by faculty. Faculty have had no input in how the transition is to take place, no voice in the discussion and the process has been opaque. For example, we have been told that faculty need to pursue more grant funding, and if we did, we would have course releases to help support our work while also mentoring graduate students. However, Towson also decided to make advising obligatory for all full-time faculty. This places an incredible work demand on all faculty, especially those who conduct research. Without clear policies, procedures and good faith, faculty have little choice or voice in workload discussions and there is often evidence of favoritism. For instance, as a faculty member of the College of Liberal Arts, I maintain a high research productivity crafting grant proposals, publishing journal articles and serving on multiple university-level committees, while teaching a full course load of advanced courses in criminology- 3 each semester. Faculty have virtually no avenue for reprieve or to seek help addressing these issues.

To be clear, as I am sure those in opposition to the Bill will state, faculty must provide a workload agreement whereby they designate percentages of effort across research, teaching and committee service. Therefore, in theory faculty could suggest for example 60% teaching, 30% research and 10% service, or any combination. In practice faculty are instructed to put down 75-80% teaching, 15-20% research and whatever remains for service, but also expected to produce quality research and grant-activity. Faculty dedicated to both research and teaching often work beyond the 40 hours a week, well into the weekend. Without the support of collective bargaining, faculty are subjected to the whim of administration who will readily state there are mechanisms for research support but never provide such support. From an administrative perspective this makes sense- require more work with less financial or institutional support and without any oversight or transparency. Towson University does not even have an ombudsperson to help navigate these issues, which makes collective bargaining for many of us a beacon of hope.

The Bill is about faculty choice and agency. Those in opposition will rest their argument on the concept of "shared governance." Shared governance does not exist as it depends on the

moral compass of those in positions of power. Currently, the system is set-up whereby faculty have little say in shared governance. Administrators can impose conditions without consequence. One such example is the allocation of merit funds. Prior to the pandemic, departmental faculty committees were tasked with reviewing faculty portfolios and determining eligibility for merit. Currently, Department Chairs are given sole power over merit. This is problematic in various ways, least of which is abuse by Chairs and Deans. Faculty denied merit can appeal to the department promotion and tenure committee who can, and often do, overturn the Chair's unilateral decision. Sadly, that obvious form of shared governance is frequently undermined by Deans who will overturn the faculty committee. These issues, as well as the Faculty Gradual Intervention Guidelines (<https://www.towson.edu/provost/academicresources/facultyinterventionguidelinesmay282020academicsenate.doc>) have deepened issues with diversity, equity, and inclusion, but faculty are unable to address these problems without fear of administrative retaliation and possible termination. In short, faculty are easily targeted and protections against abuse are scarce. Ultimately, students are the ones affected, as professors face burnout and disengagement from academia. Starting before the pandemic, but certainly during and after it, we are seeing more educators leave, because of pervasive harassment, abuse, low wages and lack of support seen as a USM level. The right to collective bargaining is a first step in creating a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable higher education in Maryland, that will benefit students and faculty alike.

Members of the committee, this state has for decades viewed collective bargaining between state employees and management as the best way to enroot democracy in our workplaces and public education institutions. The right to collective bargaining has been long recognized not only as a fundamental human right, but it has also in this state been seen 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 education institutions in the country, and indeed to many private, prestigious institutions in our own state. The reasons to exempt 4-year public institutions from this path just no longer make sense, especially as they ultimately impact those we hold to be most important in our professions- the students. 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.