

February 11, 2025

## Written testimony in support of Collective Bargaining Rights for Maryland Higher Education Faculty

If I had to provide just one reason why we need this Bill (SB0750-HB0661) to pass it would be this: I fear retaliation from my university for supporting this bill, which is why I am not signing this letter with identifiable personal information. What kind of working conditions are those? I recall perfectly well that my university's provost took the trouble to travel to Annapolis to testify against the Bill two years ago, so I know that my university and the USM will do anything to block the passage of this Bill. And I cannot afford to lose my job.

I am an Associate Professor at Salisbury University and I call on this committee to issue a favorable report to this Bill. The state already grants the right of collective bargaining to 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. It makes no sense to discriminate against faculty in 4-year colleges.

As a professor, I usually teach three courses every semester, with 30 to 35 students in each course. I have been teaching almost one hundred students every semester since I arrived at Salisbury University, in addition to completing the service and professional development requirements that are part of every tenured and tenure-track faculty's responsibilities. It is indeed a heavy workload, though I find my job to be extremely fulfilling.

I support this Bill because I have experienced and witnessed among my colleagues a steep decline in morale since I arrived at my job. The pandemic did not help, but even before 2020, the signs of strain in my workplace were clear. While unionizing will not fix all problems, it will at the very least address a pressing issue at SU—retention of highly qualified and talented employees. Most tenure-track faculty searches are conducted on a national level, with averages of upwards of 100 candidates per job. This means that SU is able to attract the very best faculty out there, but retaining them is another matter. Turnover is high. Of the new faculty who came to SU the same year I did, only 62% are still teaching at SU—the rest (38%) have left. In my experience, unionized workplaces do a much better job of retaining their employees because they seek the protections afforded by a union.

My department has lost three instructors to retirement in the past six years, which means that students do not have access to crucial courses in our discipline. (I have just learned that another department has lost eleven tenure-track faculty since academic year 2019/2020.) The university's president has centralized the hiring of PIN lines in her office, making it thus far impossible for our department (and others) to replace faculty. Meanwhile the ranks of the administration swell, with significant paychecks to go along despite their rhetoric of austerity. According to a 2024 report from SU's Faculty Financial Oversight Committee, "for the six years 2018-2023, total faculty salary spending increased 10.7%, whereas total salary spending for the 66 top-level administration positions increased 29.4% (i.e., 3 times as much)." The numbers are telling.

As bureaucratic and even janitorial tasks mount for faculty—we are now required to empty our trash cans—teaching support dwindles. In an effort to increase enrollments, the university's admittance rate is higher than it has normally been (currently at 91%). While this is a good thing because we are serving more students and the majority of them are Marylanders; unfortunately, many more students come to us lacking the necessary skills and preparation to succeed in college. We have academic support offices to address this problem, but they are severely and chronically understaffed.

The disconnect between upper administrators and the faculty grows wider every year. In recent years, there has been a succession of two presidents and two provosts, with markedly different ways of operating. Whereas our previous provost made an effort to get to know the faculty, our current administrators are rarely seen without their respective entourages and have cared little to get to know us, our names, etc. The culture is changing, for the worse. A good indication of this is that our Faculty Senate summoned an extraordinary all-faculty meeting last year to discuss an anonymous letter of grievances directed at the administration. As it turned out, the letter only addressed a fraction of the concerns that many professors share, and little has been done to tackle them.

The upper administration at SU speaks of shared governance to oppose this Bill. There is a measure of shared governance in that the Faculty Senate can work through certain issues, such as revising student evaluation forms and drafting an intellectual property policy for instructional materials, to mention two current initiatives. But, on the heftier questions of expenditure, allocation of resources, and work conditions, faculty have no say. Make no mistake: what shared governance we have is a watered-down version of it, one that allows administrators to claim that their decisions have been made in consultation with representatives of faculty and staff. The distinction between a consultative role and a seat at the negotiating table is key here. Consulting faculty is not enough—as stable pillars of the university, while administrators come and go, we faculty ought to have a seat at the negotiating table, to make decisions alongside administrators for the betterment of our university.

Enacting this Bill will help us begin to reverse attacks on higher education. How? 1) By negotiating fair and equitable working conditions for all faculty, including faculty of color who have traditionally faced important challenges in my predominantly white institution and contractual faculty who in recent years have seen a reduction in the classes they are able to teach and are notified at the very last minute of assigned classes. 2) By negotiating the governance of the university and allocation of resources, ensuring that faculty have an independent collective voice that carries weight at the negotiating table. Serving our students, our community, and Maryland in the best way we can is at the core of what we do. This Bill will get us closer to achieving this goal.

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 on this Bill.

Sincerely,

A concerned professor at Salisbury University