

Effective Worker Protections Require Effective Enforcement

Position Statement in Support of Senate Bill 6

Given before the Finance Committee

The Maryland General Assembly declared in 2023 that it is the public policy of the state of Maryland to encourage and protect public sector employees' rights of freedom of association, self-organization, and collective bargaining of the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection. State law further states that the best way to protect these rights and promote constructive public labor relations is to grant public employees the right to organize and require public employers to negotiate with workers' chosen representatives. Senate Bill 6 puts this commitment into action for non-tenure track faculty at Maryland's Public Universities, a vital and growing component of our higher education workforce. For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports Senate Bill 6.

Colleges and universities across the United States have dramatically increased their reliance on adjunct and other non-tenure track faculty on the last several decades. Two-thirds of faculty nationwide were in non-tenure track positions as of 2021, up from 47% in 1987. Only 29% of women faculty were in tenured or tenure track positions, compared to 40% of men, and faculty belonging to "underrepresented minority" groups were less likely to have a tenured or tenure track position than their white counterparts.

Non-tenure track faculty have considerably less stability and job security than other faculty. They typically have lower pay, with part-time faculty at reporting institutions taking home less than \$4,100 per three-credit course section in the 2023–2024 academic year, on average – less than they did before the COVID-19 pandemic, adjusted for inflation. Most part-time faculty did not receive employer contributions for health care or retirement benefits.

Collective bargaining rights would grant non-tenure track faculty a voice on the job and better enable them to negotiate for family-sustaining wages and benefits. It would also likely advance racial equity in these workers' pay, as Black workers nationwide typically see considerably larger wage gains from unionization than their white peers.

Senate Bill 6 would put Maryland in good company. Faculty at our state's community colleges have had collective bargaining rights since 2021. More than half of states recognize collective bargaining rights for at least some faculty at public higher education institutions, and faculty at most peer institutions of Maryland's public universities have these rights.

Collective bargaining rights for non-tenure track faculty are especially important at a time when the federal government is increasingly attacking higher education and limiting academic freedom. Faculty without the formal protections of tenure are the most vulnerable to these attacks. Collective bargaining rights would not only protect these workers but would strengthen democracy, as research shows that union members vote in higher numbers than their non-union counterparts.

Faculty at Maryland's public institutions are key to our state's economic future, and too many live with precarious employment and no voice in the workplace. Recognizing these workers' collective bargaining rights would put Maryland's actions in line with its stated values.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Senate Finance Committee make a favorable report on Senate Bill 6.