

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
SB0006**

State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Nontenure Track Faculty

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FAVORABLE

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

My name is Susannah Paletz, and I am an Associate Professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked since 2013 as both a tenured professor and a professional track professor and research scientist. 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. As a Maryland resident, I believe that this right should be extended to the rest of higher education in Maryland.

I received my doctorate in 2003 and have had a variety of occupational positions in government, at university affiliated research centers, and now at the College of Information. Through a series of fortunate events, I became a tenured associate professor in 2021 after being an untenured, professional track faculty (PTK) member for 8 years. While all faculty deserve collective bargaining rights, non-tenure-track faculty are among the most vulnerable. I have three major issues I wish to have on the record that are specific to PTK at the University of Maryland: 1) The intense workload of faculty. 2) The lack of ability to take sick time for teaching faculty due to the unique (rare) inflexibility of faculty jobs. In the past, I also testified about the disempowerment of faculty with regards to public health strategy, which is still true, but I will focus today on workload and fundamental labor protections involving sick time.

As someone who has studied, taught, and practiced organizational psychology and management, and who has worked outside of academia, the sheer number of tasks and constant task switching are overwhelming. For PTK faculty who teach, this is in large part because teaching is more time consuming than officially budgeted. Two courses, the typical number for tenured/tenure-track faculty, is considered by the university to take 40% of a 40-hour work week (16 hours/week). However, this is a massive underestimate. Personally, I have taught anywhere from 11 to over 300 students a semester; while the latter large courses come with support by graders and teaching assistants, I note that the percent of my time spent on teaching has never been what it is supposed to be. Teaching includes organizing, teaching, mentoring, and leading my instructional team (if I have one); answering student emails and questions on a discussion board; preparing lectures and section activities; creating assignments and exams, relevant rubrics for grading them, and instruction/prep materials for students; grading and calibrating grading for my instructional team; and more. As an example, for each new 50-minute lecture, it typically takes me 5-8 hours to research the topic, prepare what I will say, find and assess appropriate images/figures, and create slides. Even updating these slides takes me 2-3 hours each lecture. Speaking with colleagues, this amount of time is typical. As our majors have become more popular and grown, so have our classes. This growth is a good thing for the financial health of our College and University, and for the training and education of our students. But, it also highlights the weaknesses of the system.

Administrative and project management roles: One of the essential tasks of certain kinds of PTK is conducting research. I lead complex multidisciplinary research projects without formal project management support. We have (often understaffed/overworked) financial specialists at the department level who are invaluable in helping us prepare and track budgets, but we lack the other project management support found in other workplaces (e.g., for creating agendas,

reminding people of tasks, watching time and budget, event management for project retreats, other administrative work). Some faculty offload these administrative tasks to graduate students; others have sufficient funds and sponsor/funder permission to hire administrative staff. But, such solutions are not always possible (e.g., hiring staff is not always allowed under all grants, nor do all faculty have grants) or ideal (i.e., having graduate students do some such work is acceptable, but having primarily administrative roles conflicts with the goals of their education and training).

The nature of academic research includes rejection, requiring working extra to meet minimum standards. Of vital importance to people in our roles, I attempt to publish in journals, submit papers for conferences (which I then need to attend), write book chapters, and so on. Many of these end in rejection, and unlike with how most people consider publications, journals do not pay us to publish--and some, even quite legitimate journals, charge us fees of almost \$4,000. I also apply for and write grant proposals, which typically takes 30-50 hours for a brief white paper proposal and 80-120 for a full proposal where I am to be a principal investigator, not including my co-writers' efforts. The nature of academic research having a high rate of rejection often means we have to submit, submit, and submit for potentially little result, working nights and weekends whenever a deadline arises. In the case of PTK research faculty, applying for additional funding or presenting to potential clients often comes as extra work, despite being vital to the university.

Service time varies and is poorly tracked. As with all faculty, I also do "service," which includes: mentoring colleagues and students (undergraduate and graduate), including serving on or chairing thesis and dissertation committees, speaking with students, and writing letters of recommendation; attending faculty meetings such as appointment, promotion, and tenure meetings; directing/organizing a research interest group; and engaging in committee work which ranges from developing curricula to evaluating other faculty, among other tasks. I have been on committees that required 20 hours a week for a month, and others that required one hour a month. Research and anecdotes suggest that women and people of color are overburdened with formal and informal service commitments (Babcock, Peyser, Vesterlund and Weingart, 2022), and that saying 'no' can result in formal and informal punishments more than others (e.g., being seen as not a team player to not being granted promotions). This work can also take from 2-20 hours a week, depending on the week.

We are fortunate to have such varied and interesting tasks, but there is 'too much job'. Gone are the days where faculty were supported by many administrative assistants (e.g., who could submit travel requests and organize receipts/repayment for faculty), and the requirements for obtaining an academic job require more and more publications and grants. The issues of workload I noted are not specific to me but are systematic. This workload takes a toll not only on professional (and tenure) track faculty, but on graduate students and staff, as well as student learning. Should we be able to collectively bargain, we could argue for ways to right-size our workload, including giving more realistic time estimates of specific tasks.

The second issue is the Actual Inflexibility of Faculty Jobs and Sick Time: There is a joke about academia: "you are free to work whatever 12 hours a day you choose." Academia is thought to be flexible, but one cannot simply reschedule classes or meetings with other tightly-scheduled faculty. You also can't simply skip out on most work. What this inflexibility means is that most faculty have poor work-life balance to the point of it making handling normal health issues even more challenging. A series of health issues struck my family in 2023 and have continued in different forms. These experiences made me notice that although we have sick time, faculty do not have 'backfill' in the way other jobs do, and so can only take sick time effectively during school breaks unless incapacitated. Even taking small amounts of 'sick time' results not in a release from work, but in putting that work back into late nights and early mornings. Specifically, my husband was ill in February 2023 and then later required surgery. I could not take off time to care for him because there was no way to offload the work. More recently, I was able to officially take FMLA leave to help care for other ill and injured family members. I still had to teach - we do not have

substitute teachers - and then the work I did not do during my FMLA leave (20 hours in one week) ended up getting moved to the following weeks, resulting in me being dangerously underslept and behind all semester, adding to my already 60-hour/week workload. The United States is infamous for having many jobs with poor sick time rules and realities. Despite the other benefits of the position, faculty here do not have true sick time, unless they are on sabbatical or officially not teaching. The actual inflexibility of the job and its workload make a mockery of the ostensible policies regarding sick time. Collective bargaining would enable us to raise these as real problems and threats to labor regulations and enable us to have a voice in solving them. The lack of job security for employees who give so much to the University is an additional problem.

Collective bargaining would enable us to more effectively bring faculty expertise to bear in solving challenges such as workload, service inequities, and the actual practice of using sick time. The University plays a vital role in the prosperity and intellectual wealth of Maryland and our local community. Should the faculty gain the right to collectively bargain and vote for a union, that union could also add its efforts to protecting our University against federal government overreach and illegal actions.

It is through the right to collectively bargain--a right afforded almost all other Maryland Public Employees and USM peer institutions--that non-tenure-track faculty, and, hopefully soon, all faculty, will have the voice they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Reference:

Babcock, L., Peyser, B., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2022). *The no club: Putting a stop to women's dead-end work*. Simon and Schuster.

Sincerely,

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This testimony has been submitted on behalf of this individual by the United Academics of Maryland (UAM).