

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

State Personnel - Collective Bargaining - Nontenure Track Faculty

February 05, 2026

FAVORABLE

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

I am Eric Zakim, an associate professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am working with my colleagues in United Academics of Maryland-University of Maryland (UAM), an affiliate of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), to secure collective bargaining rights for faculty in Maryland's public four-year institutions.

I have been employed at the university since 2002 and have core faculty appointments in the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures where I helped establish the Program in Cinema and Media Studies (which is growing and thriving in an era of retrenchment in the Humanities); the Department of English (within the Program in Comparative Literature); and in the Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies. I came to UMD from Duke University, because I believe in the mission of public education and in the specific potential of UMD to be a leader in higher education.

Over the past 24 years (and, indeed, since 1993 when I left graduate school and began my academic career as an assistant professor), I have seen the steady decline of my profession and the decline of the faculty at my university. Across the country, morale within the professorate of the universities has never been lower, at least in the Humanities. When I get together with colleagues from other universities, let alone from my home university, the conversation usually includes a comparative study of the signs of decay and disintegration within the stature, morale, and the working conditions of the faculty.

Faculty governance, a bedrock university principle since the very inception of universities in the Middle Ages, has all but disappeared. At times, working at a university feels like being within George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where the fundamental principles of the new society are slowly corrupted and mangled, until they are no longer recognizable. Decisions about curriculum, hiring, salary, and the like were always officially made by the administrators of the university. But to promote a sense of shared responsibility within the university community, in my experience--at the University of Maryland, at Duke University where I began my career, at the University of California--Berkeley where I studied for my doctorate--university administrators were careful to follow the recommendations of the faculty in these matters. Faculty governance meant something to them. Now, every discussion of these basic matters of shared governance come with a reminder that anything the faculty might aver on these issues is merely advisory, to the point that it seems administrators take nothing from the faculty into account when deciding matters that directly affect the faculty.

This separation of administration from faculty has been exacerbated by the growing salary discrepancies between these two classes of workers, along with the swelling of the administrative ranks. There was a day, not long ago, when the administrators came--and were recruited--from the faculty. And they would go back to the classroom and to their studies after serving their administrative term, as in the spirit of the mythic emperor of republican Rome, Cincinnatus. Over the past 25 years, I am at a loss to identify a single administrator who came back to the regular ranks of the faculty after tasting the privileges, power, and financial gain of the administrative class.

For these reasons, it is no small wonder that we are seeing in Maryland a desire--a movement --to reassert the original principles of shared governance among all the members of the university community. Within this context, we have witnessed the development and growth of a graduate student union committed to having a say in matters pertaining to their rank and file at the university. In the same way, a faculty union has come into existence, in the wake of deteriorating conditions for both tenure-track and adjunct ranks among the faculty.

There's a solid rule, perhaps even a sort of natural law, that university administrative as well as corporate bosses ignore in their fights against the unionization of the employees they see as "under" them: in this day and age, unions are generally a desperate, last-ditch effort of employees to actually save their places of business against the efforts of the managerial class, which is out of touch with what happens in the trenches of the industry.

It's one thing for Starbucks to ignore and fight unionization, which they do at their own financial and corporate peril. For a university to do so, let alone a public university that represents the finest principles and aspirations of an enlightened and diverse state such Maryland, the stakes are much higher. The effort to form unions is an effort to re?niven the University of Maryland: to give it new life, to assert the university's place within the community and within the nation, which is undergoing upheaval and crisis. The effort to unionize is an effort to reclaim the power of democratic community, where community is the sum of all its members: citizens, legislators, faculty, and students.

Frankly, the group with the lower stake in the community--who might not even properly be called part of the university community--are the administrators, whose role is akin to corporate managers. The effort to unionize is an effort to realign the principles of education with those directly involved in the fundamental activities of the university: scholarship, research, teaching, and learning.

It has always seemed to me odd when a university administration opposes the unionization of graduate students and faculty. What are they opposed to? The democratic, shared governance of the institution? What is so threatening about proposition? Today, the student newspaper at UMD reported that the university system is activity opposing the legislation that would grant the graduate student union collective bargaining rights, the right, that is, to speak in one voice about their conditions at the university. Why would the system be against such a proposal? What do they find so challenging?

The opposition of the university administration to the unionization efforts seems rooted in their identification with the managerial systems of corporations. In this, the administration of the state system has projected for itself a model of the university based on antagonism between managers and perceived workers. But the unionization of students and faculty is meant to do something else, something far more progressive and forward-looking. That is, to imagine the university as a model of cooperation and democratic shared governance, to truly embody the ideals of the name "uni-versity": to take the many diverse voices that make up this institution--and this state--and bring them together to speak as one.

For the sake of the health of the university, and for the sake of the future of the State of Maryland, I would urge any citizen of Maryland, let alone any of its elected officials, to reverse current trends in the university system and push for the democratization of the university community by recognizing the beneficial power of unions in giving equal voice to all parts of that community.

Sincerely,

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