

In support of SB 6 – extending collective bargaining rights to some faculty.

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As the recent vice chair of Council of University System Faculty or CUSF, I have been impressed that CUSF has consistently, for the past 15 years, supported granting faculty at University System of Maryland the right to collectively bargain. Our last vote at CUSF in December was unanimous in support of our resolution in favor of Collective Bargaining rights.

Based on my own experience working with CUSF, I strongly support the legislature extending collective bargaining rights to our faculty at USM. Despite the widespread perception, the primary impact of collective bargaining for faculty would not be on salaries; on the contrary, faculty salaries can not be dictated by a union, where the legislature and the governor have the authority over spending. This is especially the case in an era where our state faces major fiscal challenges. Rather, the primary benefit of a union is to ensure faculty voices on key academic issues are taken seriously. The University System of Maryland is organized around the principle of Shared Governance. Ideally, Shared Governance would give faculty a seat at the table during decision making on important issues. Unfortunately, in situations where administrators make arbitrary decisions that are not well justified, faculty input can simply be ignored. Although this occurs only in a minority of situations, when the leadership of a department or school is weak and insecure, and capricious or self-serving decisions are challenged, faculty input can seem threatening. Not only can faculty input be ignored, but there can be retribution against faculty members who express positions that conflict with the administrator's objectives.

Many state universities across the country have collective bargaining rights for their faculty. Speaking with colleagues at states such as New York, they find that collective bargaining ensures more balanced, well considered decision making. It is faculty who best understand the needs of our universities, whether for strengthening education of our students in Maryland or in supporting this research mission at USM, which is a critical economic engine for this state. Collective bargaining rights would also improve our ability to attract the very best faculty members to our state's public university. I recommend strongly that you support this bill and also future bills extending collective bargaining rights to all USM faculty.