

The People Who Make Maryland's Community Colleges Run Deserve a Voice on the Job

Position statement in support of Senate Bill 746

Given before the Senate Finance Committee

Community colleges offer students across Maryland the opportunity to acquire the skills required for in-demand, family-supporting jobs—and strengthen our economy in the process. However, they do not always offer decent jobs to the very people who keep them going. Current law prohibits most workers at community colleges from joining together to formally negotiate for decent wages and working conditions, denying them a basic freedom afforded to other educational workers as well as most workers in the private sector. The Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports Senate Bill 746 because it would extend basic organizing rights to the workers who make Maryland's community colleges successful.

Strong evidence shows that the economy creates better jobs across the board when working people have the power in numbers that widespread union membership brings.ⁱ All workers come to expect better wages, benefits, and working conditions, and employers must adjust in order to attract and retain employees. On the other hand, an economy where union jobs are scarce leaves workers on their own at the negotiating table and gives employers little reason to offer decent jobs. As many union jobs have disappeared in recent decades, the resulting shift in power has steered the fruits of economic growth away from the majority of Marylanders.

There is no clear reason why Maryland's community college employees don't have the right to collectively bargain statewide when those rights are guaranteed to over 100,000 faculty and staff at K-12 public schools, 60,000 state workers, and 4,000 faculty and staff at four community colleges. As the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized, this right is about much more than improving pay and benefits. Workers can come together to ensure there is a safe and productive learning environment for themselves and their students, and negotiate around improved working conditions like being able to offer office hours so they can better support their students.

Community colleges also have potential to serve as engines of opportunity for workers who are often locked out of decent jobs by past and ongoing racist and sexist policies:ⁱⁱ

- 60 percent of workers at higher education institutions operated by local governments in Maryland are women.
- 37 percent of employees at local-run colleges are workers of color, and 22 percent are Black workers.
 - In comparison, Black workers account for only 13 percent of employees at private, not-for-profit colleges and universities in Maryland.
- 24 percent of workers at local-run colleges are women of color, and 14 percent are Black women.
 - Black women account for only 8 percent of employees at private colleges and universities.
- 22 percent of core faculty at local-run colleges in Maryland are women of color, including 12 percent who are Black women.

- Only 13 percent of core faculty at private colleges and universities in Maryland are women of color, and only 3 percent are Black women.

However, many essential jobs at Maryland community colleges do not pay family-supporting wages, and women and workers of color are more likely to occupy these roles:ⁱⁱⁱ

- 10 percent of employees at two-year colleges in Maryland take home less than \$23,700 per year, or nearly 2,000 workers. One in four two-year college employees take home less than \$36,300 per year.
- 25 percent of office and administrative support workers at two-year colleges in Maryland take home less than \$27,900 per year. This group includes office clerks, administrative assistants, and other workers necessary for smooth daily operation.
 - At local-run colleges in Maryland, 60 percent of office and administrative support employees are workers of color and 40 percent are Black workers.
 - 74 percent of office and administrative support workers are women and 37 percent are women of color.
- Half of building and grounds cleaning and maintenance workers at Maryland two-year colleges take home less than \$30,500 per year and a quarter take home less than \$26,500. Half of two-year college employees in personal care and service occupations take home less than \$26,400 per year. Workers of color are more likely than their white counterparts to work in these and similar low-wage service positions.
- 79 percent of administrators and managers at local-run colleges in Maryland are white. Only 17 percent are women of color and only 9 percent are Black.

Significant numbers of community college faculty and other instructional workers also take home paltry wages:

- More than one-quarter of the nearly 1,800 teaching assistants at Maryland two-year colleges take home less than \$24,000 per year.
- At least 375 core faculty take home less than \$21,300. An additional 400 workers in miscellaneous instructional positions take home less than \$32,300
- Altogether, about 1,100 educational instruction and library workers at two-year colleges in Maryland take home less than \$21,460 per year.

When we use our shared investments to support family-sustaining public service jobs, we all reap the benefits in the form of higher-quality public services and a stronger labor market. Senate Bill 746 would move Maryland toward this ideal by guaranteeing community college workers the right to a voice on the job.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Finance Committee make a favorable report on Senate Bill 746.

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 746

Bill summary

Senate Bill 746 would extend collective bargaining rights to most community college staff in Maryland.

Background

Maryland community colleges serve more than 100,000 students across Maryland, including nearly half of all in-state undergraduate students.

Most employees at Maryland community colleges currently do not have collective bargaining rights. Exceptions include some non-faculty workers at Baltimore City Community College, the Community College of Baltimore County, Montgomery College, and Prince George's Community College as well as faculty at Montgomery College. The Department of Legislative Services estimates that up to 12,500 workers could gain collective bargaining rights under Senate Bill 746.

Equity Implications

The community college workers who would gain basic organizing rights under Senate Bill 746 are disproportionately women and workers of color. Women and workers of color especially likely to occupy roles that could benefit significantly from joining together to negotiate about working conditions.

Only limited data exist specifically on the workforce at community colleges. However, data on two-year colleges (public and private) and data on local-run colleges (regardless of type of institution) provide insight into these workers:

- Community colleges are important employers for women and workers of color in Maryland:
 - 60 percent of workers at higher education institutions operated by local governments in Maryland are women.
 - 37 percent of employees at local-run colleges are workers of color, and 22 percent are Black workers.
 - 24 percent of workers at local-run colleges are women of color, and 14 percent are Black women.
- Community colleges employ more Black faculty than private, nonprofit colleges and universities:
 - 16 percent of core faculty at local-run colleges in Maryland are Black, compared to only 6 percent at private, nonprofit colleges and universities.
 - 22 percent of core faculty at local-run colleges in Maryland are women of color, including 12 percent who are Black women.
- Thousands of jobs at community colleges pay paltry wages, including many faculty and other instructional positions:
 - 10 percent of employees at two-year colleges in Maryland take home less than \$23,700 per year, or nearly 2,000 workers. One in four two-year college employees take home less than \$36,300 per year.
 - More than one-quarter of the nearly 1,800 teaching assistants at Maryland two-year colleges take home less than \$24,000 per year.
 - At least 375 core faculty take home less than \$21,300. An additional 400 workers in miscellaneous instructional positions take home less than \$32,300
 - Altogether, about 1,100 educational instruction and library workers at two-year colleges in Maryland take home less than \$21,460 per year.
- Women and workers of color are more likely than white men to hold relatively low-paying positions at community colleges and less likely to hold leadership positions:
 - At local-run colleges in Maryland, 60 percent of office and administrative support employees are workers of color and 40 percent are Black workers.
 - 74 percent of office and administrative support workers are women and 37 percent are women of color.
 - 79 percent of administrators and managers at local-run colleges in Maryland are white. Only 17 percent are women of color and only 9 percent are Black.

Impact

Senate Bill 746 would likely **improve racial, gender, and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ Josh Bivens, Lora Engdahl, Elise Gould, Teresa Kroeger, Celine McNicholas, Lawrence Mishel, Zane Mokhiber, Heidi Shierholz, Marino von Wilpert, Valerie Wilson, and Ben Zipperer, “How Today’s Unions Help Working People: Giving Workers the Power to Improve their Jobs and Unrig the Economy,” Economic Policy Institute, 2017, <https://www.epi.org/publication/how-todays-unions-help-working-people-giving-workers-the-power-to-improve-their-jobs-and-unrig-the-economy>

ⁱⁱ MDCEP analysis of IPUMS 2015–2019 American Community Survey microdata. Universe is people who work at colleges, universities, and professional schools, including junior colleges, located in Maryland. American Community Survey microdata do not distinguish between two-year and four-year institutions. This analysis uses local-run colleges as a proxy for community colleges. However, this measure excludes Baltimore City Community College and may include institutions other than community colleges.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wage data based on May 2019 Occupational Employment Statistics Research Estimates for junior colleges in Maryland. Demographic data based on MDCEP analysis of IPUMS 2015–2019 American Community Survey microdata. Universe is people who work at colleges, universities, and professional schools, including junior colleges, located in Maryland.

In this document, “two-year colleges” is used synonymously with the “junior colleges” industry classification.

Occupational Employment Statistics Research Estimates do not disaggregate employers by ownership. Therefore, this analysis may include privately operated two-year institutions.

See endnote ii for discussion of demographic data issues.