

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

House Bill 233
Economic Matters

(Delegate Vogel, *et al.*)

Finance

**Labor and Employment - Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters -
Employee Attendance and Participation (Maryland Worker Freedom Act)**

This bill prohibits employers from taking or threatening to take specified adverse actions against an employee because the employee declines to attend or participate in an employer-sponsored meeting in which the employer communicates opinions regarding religious or political matters, as defined by the bill. Additionally, an employer may not fail or refuse to hire an applicant for employment as a result of the applicant's refusal to attend or participate in an employer-sponsored meeting during which the employer communicates opinions regarding religious or political matters. An employer is not prohibited from communicating information that the employer is required by law to communicate or conducting a meeting that involves religious or political matters if attendance and participation are voluntary.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: As the bill does not have any enforcement mechanisms or penalties, the Maryland Department of Labor can issue compliance guidance and answer questions with existing resources. To the extent any additional litigation occurs, the Judiciary expects the impact to be minimal and notes there is no adjudication process. The bill does not apply to the State as an employer.

Local Effect: None. The bill does not apply to local governments as employers.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: “Political matters” is defined as matters relating to elections for political office, political parties, proposals to change legislation, regulations, or public policy, or the decision to join or support a political party or potential civic, community, fraternal, or labor organization. “Religious matters” means matters relating to religious belief, affiliation, and practice or the decision to join or support a religious entity.

The bill does not apply to an employer that is a religious corporation, organization, or association, or a specified religious educational institution or society.

Current Law: The State does not have protections for employees who decline to attend employer meetings.

Unlawful Discrimination

State law generally prohibits an employer with at least 15 employees from discharging, failing or refusing to hire, or otherwise discriminating against any individual with respect to the individual’s compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, military status, or disability. The State and local governments are considered employers.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 802 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: SB 576 (Senator Lam, *et al.*) - Finance.

Information Source(s): Maryland Commission on Civil Rights; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland Municipal League; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); University System of Maryland; Department of Budget and Management; Maryland Department of Labor; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

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