

Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association
AFT Local 4828
Submitted by Sara Lee Herzig
SB 556 - Collective Bargaining – Staff – Maryland School for the Deaf
Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 25, 2021

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Good afternoon madam Chair and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Sara Lee Herzig and I am the middle school & high school American Sign Language (ASL) Teacher as well as ASL Specialist, AFT Local 4828, the union for educational staff working at the Maryland School for Deaf. On behalf of the hundreds of public school educators working to teach Maryland's students enrolled at our state's School for the Deaf, I call for a favorable-with-amendments report on SB 556, the bill that would grant us the right to engage in collective bargaining, a right that every other public school teacher in the state has.

I have taught in middle school and high school. I have additional responsibilities which includes assessing students when requested on their American Sign Language skills. More and more students are receiving services for ASL. It consumes my time as a teacher and interferes with planning. Many students come from various backgrounds and varying language skills. We serve students from all over the state, not just a local school district or even a county. I am state-certified: all of our teachers at the school must have the same credentials and follow the same licensure standards as any other public school teacher in Maryland, and we also must follow the curricula established by the state Board of Education. The teachers at Maryland School for the Deaf are expected to get Masters in Education/Arts. We are just like any other public school teacher in Maryland, except for three important distinctions. First, all of the students we teach are deaf or hard-of-hearing, therefore we have to be proficient in American Sign Language. Second, all of our students are on Individual Education Plans (IEP) so the teachers are part of the IEP team developing IEPs and attend IEP meetings. Lastly for some reason, our teachers do not work under the protections of a collectively bargained union contract. With this bill, we hope to correct that mistake.

Members of the committee, it is an unfortunate truth that our educational staff are part of the very few public school educators that do not enjoy collective bargaining rights. Because of this, the Maryland School for the Deaf has been harmed. While I am proud of the work my colleagues and I do to educate the state's deaf and hard-of-hearing children, we have lost a number of high-quality educators to other districts where the benefits and job protections are more solidified. Just by way of a recent example, with the impending passage of Kirwan, which we enthusiastically support, educational staff at the school are unsure if the improvements proposed by that commission will be afforded to us, as many of the improvements proposed must be by law bargained collectively. Passage of this bill will go a long way towards seeing that our school—which provides vital educational services to Maryland's deaf and hard-of-hearing students—will no longer be treated differently than any other public school in the state.

The amendments we are proposing would clarify who is eligible for collective bargaining at the school, making the process available to teachers, specialists, and other non-supervisory staff at the school. Employees who do these jobs at schools in local county school districts have unionization rights, and the amendment we are proposing would bring the Maryland School for the Deaf in line with those school systems.

Again, I urge a favorable-with-amendments report SB 556. Thank you.

Sara Lee Herzig