

**Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association
Submitted by Randy Shank, Teacher at the Maryland School for the Deaf, and
Member, AFT Local 4828
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 Randy Shank, and I've taught for more than 25 years. I started out at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf, transferred to Metro Deaf School in Minnesota and then Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf before coming to Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD). I also have four children who attend MSD. 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.

When I came to the school in 2014, I was put at the 18-year pay step and equivalent pay on the Maryland Faculty Salary Scale. Since then, I've worked for seven years, taken many courses and professional development opportunities, and became recertified — yet I've only climbed two steps and am now at the 20-year step, despite my seven years at MSD. This isn't an isolated problem. I've also seen many of my coworkers who have worked 10, 15 years, yet they're classified at the five-year step. Unlike nearly every other public school educator in this state, we at the Maryland School for the Deaf do not have a seat at the table when it comes to bargaining a contract that stipulates our salaries, as well as governs our working conditions at the school.

This is a major problem because at MSD, one of the very best in the nation, we have an unusually high turnover among teachers. Given soaring housing prices, whether rental or purchase, the current economic environment, increased cost of living, and many other factors, it is imperative that we have collective bargaining and appropriate pay/step increases to accomplish not only retention, but high-quality teachers, high morale, and the very best in education. MSD is an excellent school, but is sorely lagging in payment and equality among teachers compared to other state schools and agencies, not to mention other Maryland county and public school systems. Passage of HB 837 would be a step in the direction of changing that, allowing us to come together and negotiate a collectively bargained contract with the administration at the school.

The amendments we are proposing would clarify who is eligible for collective bargaining at the school, making the process available to teachers, aides, 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 report for SB 556. Thank you.