

**Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association  
Submitted by Jackie Guers, IEP Coordinator at the Maryland School for the Deaf, and  
President, 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 Jackie Guers, and I am the President of, 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 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 been employed at the Maryland School for the Deaf for almost 14 years, primarily at Columbia Campus. I have taught elementary age students for 9 years in various grade levels. In my tenth year I became the Language Development Specialist who worked primarily with students with significant language and behavioral needs. At the end of my tenth year, I was asked to fill a much needed role as an IEP Coordinator. I have remained an IEP Coordinator for almost four years now. Due to Maryland being parent choice, our school takes public school students from very different backgrounds all across the state—some who have been at the school since they were three years old, and some who have joined us later in middle or the high school years at the Frederick Campus. I graduated from Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania with a Master of Science degree in Deaf Education in 2007. 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. We are just like any other public school teacher in Maryland, but there are important distinctions that set us apart—we are a visual learning environment, using American Sign Language for direct instruction and communication so every child has equal access to language. Also, all of the students we teach are deaf or hard-of-hearing; they may have additional needs too, and every student over the age of three at the School for the Deaf has an IEP. For some reason, our teachers and nonsupervisory faculty 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 and staff to other schools where the benefits and job protections are more solidified. Just by way of 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, 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-with-amendments report for SB 556. Thank you.