

Written Testimony of

JAKE CIARAPICA

RE: Support of HB 1225

Submitted to the Maryland House Appropriations Committee on March 4, 2022

I am contacting you today in support of Bill HB1225. My name is Jake Ciarapica, I am a MD voter and former employee of HCPL. Harford County Public Library was a special place to begin my library career, the creativity, support, and innovation that was there, particularly in my early days, was infectious and sparked my love of library work. However, that does not mean it was a perfect work place, stagnant wages, an increasing lack of trust in staff, and regular draconian measures for popular programs which frequently got them cancelled or disrupted all influenced my choice to leave.

During my four years at HCPL I won 2 awards, was regularly complimented for the innovation and successes I was bringing to the system. I loved the system, and I think the system liked me. I have a lot of respect for many of HCPL's employees, including management there, they were instrumental in making me the librarian I am today. But the system forced me to leave.

I left making only \$37,000 a year, after 4 years of award winning work, I was stuck at the bottom of my payscale. I had received literally no raises in that time. I was a one man department at my branch, and regularly ran 3-4 programs a week, would shift from 2 hours of back to back desk work to 3 hours of programming. Concerns about too much work and not enough planning time were brushed off as me not managing my time well enough. I began having to turn down invitations to advocate for teens at the state wide level, because I didn't even have enough time for job basics. After months and months of this, with no end in sight, I was burned out. Only after I turned in my notice of resignation was I offered a raise, while it was flattering it was time to switch systems.

I switched systems, and though my new job isn't perfect, I have received regular raises and support at work. After 4 years here, I am making \$55,000 a year, a modest, but respectable salary that has allowed me to do things I thought might always be outside my economic ability, like buy a house. Recently, after some encouragement from me, a friend applied and was offered a job as a teen library associate, the same job I had. They offered her \$18/hour, \$37,440 a year... I was floored. These were low wages when I started the job in 2014, they were low when I left four years ago, and they were starvation wages now. My friend declined the job, meaning HCPL missed out on a talented young librarian that I am certain would bring the same award winning innovation they saw in me all those years ago.

Harford County Public Library is a special place, it's staff are talented and passionate, it has done some amazing things. But it is drowning under a barrage of burn out, lack of respect and

communication, and outright hostility towards employees from management. Innovation is being squashed from mismanagement. There is a reason the system has had between 35-40 openings consistently for nearly 5 years.

A union will not fix everything, but it will give Harford County Public Library employees a voice, and a much needed seat at the table. Their complaints have gone ignored and unheard for years now. If the community truly loves its library employees, if our community leaders truly feel that the library has been a corner stone of the community, then they need to be allowed to voice and have these issues addressed.

Sincerely,

Jake Ciarapica