

Written Testimony of

BETHANY VANGRIN

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H.B. 1225 Education – Harford County Public Library – Collective Bargaining

My name is Bethany Vangrin, and I am a native Harford Countian, living in the Bel Air community for 40+ years. For the past 15 years, I have been employed within the Harford County Public Library as a Library Associate II and hold a master's degree in Library and Informational Science. My roots run deeply for Harford County and the library system.

During my tenure with Harford County Public Library, I have witnessed many changes and pivots to meet our customers' needs and expectations. The majority have been positive, such as adding the Early Learning Center to the Bel Air Branch Children's Department, where I currently work.

However, one change I do not favor is the lack of support for workers at the library branches and the elimination of valuable positions within the organization, including the Children's and Teen Coordinator, the Volunteer Coordinator, and Programming Specialist, to name a few. The loss of these positions within HCPL has caused undue stress on employees as tasks from the vacant positions are moved to lower-level positions without compensation or reevaluation of the job description. For instance, in 2019, I was asked to fill in as the Acting Chairperson of the system's Early Literacy Team due to the Children's and Teen Coordinator vacancy. In 2022, I still serve as Chairperson of the team with no end date in sight. Although I love to lead this team and am entirely dedicated to the young people of this county, it does add duties to my workload.

When questioning senior administration about the vacant coordinator position, the response is that the positions remain on hold and will be re-evaluated in the future. However, in July 2020, the role of Children's and Teen Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator, and Programming Specialist were all eliminated from the list of open vacancies in reports from the Board of Trustees, leading one to surmise that these positions will not return to the system or management is hiding the extent to which the library system is understaffed.

The librarians of Harford County have a passion for serving the youth of Harford County. Without the leadership position of the Children's and Teen Coordinator, unfortunately, we lack a voice within the administration and feel a need to be part of the discussion to further the needs of our families in Harford County. Innovative programming ideas, once a cornerstone of HCPL, have sadly diminished over the years with the vacancy of the coordinator position. Initiatives, such as incorporating digital media into storytime and training librarians in media mentorship for families, have slowly disappeared from the library's focus. Don't the children and families of Harford County deserve more from their library system?

I realize union representation may not solve all the Harford County Public Library issues. Still, I feel strongly that a union is the best pathway to allowing employees' voices to be heard. I am asking for a favorable report on HB1225 for collective bargaining for Harford County Public Library employees.

Thank you for your time.
Bethany Vangrin