

Written Testimony of

BETHANY HACKER

RE: Support of HB 1225

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

Honorable Delegates,

My name is Bethany Hacker. I am a former employee of the Harford County Public Library and wish to voice my support for HB 1225 and the current employees of the HCPL system. I no longer live (or vote) in Maryland, and that is directly related to the toxic work conditions of the Harford County Public Library. I chose to move to a new library system rather than continue in Harford County. That is what brought me to South Carolina. If I had an alternative, or an advocate to assist with maneuvering through the issues at the library, I would have joyfully stayed.

I would like to state that I have always been anti-union. I believed unions exist to protect those workers who don't want to work or are not dedicated to the success of the company that pays them. It was my believe that workers who want to work and do the very best job they can, even if at times unrewarded, don't need a union. After my experience at HCPL, my thought process on this topic was turned on its head. Without some outside recourse, the insular nature of the library structure will continue to damage the library that the community wants and has been proud to have. My experiences, as well as a dozen or more similar stories from employees, have caused an exodus of talent to leave the county for other systems. It is not pay or benefits, which are no worse than other systems. I have no doubt the staff were pleased to be paid during the pandemic. (But, unlike many may think, it was not a free ride any more than for those in other industries who were not furloughed. Buildings may have been closed but work went on, just in new forms and through new tasks.) And there were myriad flexibilities that were instituted during my time with the system, and continue today, to make up for a lack of raises.

Unfortunately, there are several situations that make much of this moot. The shortage of staff makes it impossible for any flexibility, one of the so-called benefits offered. My full time position was developing and managing adult programming for the branches. That now falls to staff at the branches, who barely have time to keep up with the minimal tasks. Entire services to the community were dropped because one position was not refilled. Imagine the impact on the staff and the customers when a dozen positions are not filled.

But what trumps(ed) all of this is a total lack of respect for what the staff does to serve the community and the retribution for questioning or speaking up. This has gone on for years. Personally, I was belittled in front of other staff members and once in front of a group of customers, had resources suddenly denied without reason, was reprimanded for my name positively appearing in the news, and rebuked because I was individually honored by a

community group. What I heard and saw involving other staff members was much worse. However, the retribution I experienced even after I left the system was extreme. A vicious accusation of harassment (so intense a supposed TRO was issued. It was not.) was reported throughout the system at staff meetings and within the community through the grapevine. It necessitated me hiring an attorney to get it to stop.

All of this is what makes for a toxic work environment - death by a thousand paper cuts is still death. The Board has shown itself to be ineffective when it comes to this issue. In fact it has shown itself to be part of the problem, with a Board member castigating the staff on Staff Day for their low morale! Even before my leaving in 2017, employees of the system were trying to make things better. They talked and discussed with managers (whose hands are tied and mostly in agreement), the administrators, and the Board. But there was and is never any action or positive result. So where to turn? I am not sure a union will help. And perhaps employees as a whole will not want one. But please allow the HCPL staff the possibility of this assistance and support.

Sincerely,

Bethany Hacker