

12/16/22

I'm writing to express my support, as a library worker, to extend collective bargaining rights to all public library workers in Maryland.

It's not often acknowledged in the wider community that we are not only providers of information, but also caregivers and social workers. The "librarian" (who may not even have a degree in Library Science) is frequently the most consistent and reliable presence in the life of isolated and vulnerable members of our community. For seniors with limited mobility, for adolescents who need a safe place to go outside school, for people experiencing homelessness, the library is a refuge with no price of admission or embarrassing intake process.

For all the importance of maintaining this space and the books and resources in it, library workers receive very little institutional support. I know because I have worked in public libraries since 1999, and at Arlington Public Libraries in Virginia since 2007. Now more than ever our wages don't keep pace with inflation, while new duties are added to our job description at the drop of a pin (distributing Covid tests, acting as tech tutors and troubleshooters for online learning, and de-escalating anti-LGBTQ+ demonstrations, to name a few). Three of my coworkers have been homeless themselves, unable to afford rent in the DMV, while others have to choose between continuing to work and paying most of their income to childcare, or quitting and raising a family on a spouse's income. 80 of my coworkers were summarily furloughed in 2020; of these, the 20 with a professional degree were laid off one year later with a mass email that their "services would no longer be needed."

Like others in the helping professions, library workers experience stress and trauma when our patrons bring their own pain through our doors.<sup>1</sup> And like other care workers, we have felt unprecedented levels of job burnout in the years since Covid-19.<sup>2</sup> The best way to combat this? Make it easy to unionize. Unionization breaks the social isolation that characterizes burnout. Having a say in one's schedule, workload, assignments, pay, and benefits, supported by a collective bargaining agreement and a clear grievance process, fosters the sense of control and autonomy that a healthy worker needs.<sup>3</sup>

Library workers should have this right fully recognized and guaranteed under state law. In Virginia, the state assembly has taken a similar piecemeal approach that Maryland is taking, requiring library workers to work through a local legislative process before even holding a union

---

<sup>1</sup> Albanese, Andrew. "Groundbreaking Study Explores Trauma, Stress in Frontline Library Workers." Publishers Weekly. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/89798-groundbreaking-new-study-explores-trauma-stress-in-frontline-library-workers.html>. July 07, 2022. Accessed Dec 14, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Abramson, Ashley. "Burnout and stress are everywhere." American Psychological Association. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>. January 1, 2022. Accessed Dec 14, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> "Job burnout: How to spot it and take action." Mayo Clinic Staff. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>. Accessed Dec 14, 2022.

election. In Arlington this has set us back years in the unionization process. For overwhelmed librarians who need relief and hope now, that's untenable. But my colleagues in Maryland could get the support that my coworkers and I in Virginia haven't had, if the General Assembly passes the proposed bill.

Sincerely,  
Charlotte Malerich

*Views expressed are my own and do not represent that of my employer.*