



HB 65 - SUPPORT

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Maryland County Public Library Systems' Employee Collective Bargaining Rights

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My name is Laura Ewan, and I am Associate General Counsel for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM). I am honored to be here today speaking to you about H.B. 65, a crucial piece of legislation that will grant the employees of many of Maryland's County Public Library Systems the right to select a representative of their choosing to bargain on their behalf for their wages, hours, and working conditions.

In Maryland, each county library system exists as a creature of state statute. State law governing library structure and operations allows for boards of trustees or county governments to operate library systems and set wages, hours, and working conditions. However, the state laws do not automatically grant these entities the right to enter into binding collective bargaining agreements **absent a grant of such authority from the legislature**. That's what H.B. 65 would do—grant that authority to each County's Library employing authority to enter into a collective bargaining agreement, should the Library employees vote to be represented by a union.

Employees who work so hard to provide the numerous services that our libraries offer to the community want a voice in the conversations about the direction of the workplace. They want a seat at the table because they love their jobs. And they want meaningful representation to ensure that it stays that way. That is why we enthusiastically support this bill.

For some historical perspective, Prince Georges County Library System, Montgomery County Library System, Baltimore County Public Library System, Howard County Library System, and the Enoch Pratt Library System have all undertaken steps to allow for their library employees to be represented for purposes of collective bargaining. Prince Georges County and Montgomery County have established relationships with unions for their employees. Baltimore County's Library System employees secured their first contract last year. But having to do this on a county-by-county basis across Maryland is ineffective, inefficient, and ultimately asking for inconsistencies in how Library employees gain representation.

Instead, it just makes sense—for your busy schedules, and for these employees—to address the issue statewide. H.B. 65 does just that. It follows in the footsteps of the recently-enacted Baltimore County Public Library System legislation that made contract negotiations possible, while borrowing from language used across County collective bargaining laws across Maryland. And it excludes the counties with already existing collective bargaining laws and union representation from this Bill.

This is a common-sense approach that guarantees access to the constitutionally protected right of freedom of association. Yet there are those who oppose it. For example, during last year's Legislative Session, we

proposed legislation initially tailored for Harford County Public Library employees. During that session, we heard from opponents of granting public employees the right to collectively bargain. They said that there's no law **prohibiting** employees from forming a union, so therefore this legislation is unnecessary. But that talking point demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding about the reasons employees seek out union representation. Without that grant of authority from this Legislature to enter into collective bargaining agreements, an employee union cannot bargain with the employer about wages, hours, or working conditions. So what exactly would it be able to do?

This session, we're hearing from library management representatives that any legislation passed should borrow from Howard County's library employee collective bargaining law. While Howard County passed enabling legislation through this Legislative body, no union has organized that county's employees—which has **everything** to do with how the law is written. The law preemptively divides the group in different units, and is overly restrictive on the rights employees retain. But its biggest problem is how employees can actually start the process to obtain union representation. The Howard County law **requires** that a union seeking to represent the employees turn over to the employer a petition with signatures of employees who support the effort. In other words, employees have to out themselves as supporting the union before they have any of the protections of being represented by a union. **While the law itself prohibits “discrimination” from putting one's name on the petition, it's still asking employees to openly tell their employer that they personally want to vote on union representation, instead of letting them collectively speak through their vote for the union (or not) in a secret ballot election, as is done in every other representational forum.** No employee should be forced to voice their support or opposition to a union **to their employer**—particularly where, as we have seen firsthand in the news over the last few years in all different industries and sectors, so many employers actively oppose employees exercising their right to join a union and collectively bargain. H.B. 65 addresses these shortcomings, just like the Baltimore County legislation passed before it.

After our success of getting legislation passed for the Baltimore County employees, workers from many Maryland counties came to the IAM and asked us to do the same for them. When workers come to us for help, we respond. We drafted H.B. 65 after carefully studying existing county bargaining laws to ensure consistency, while borrowing largely from the recently passed Baltimore County legislation.

Maryland library employees need this bill passed just to have the opportunity to vote to see if they want to have a representative for collective bargaining purposes. Every single library employee we have spoken to sees this as an opportunity to make the job they love even better. These workers provide critical social and cultural services to Maryland residents, and all they ask is for the opportunity to have a collective voice at the table.

We ask you to vote in favor of this bill so library employees across Maryland can have the legal right and the freedom to choose whether they wish to be represented by a union or not for the purposes of collective bargaining.

Thank you.