

SB 556 - MD DC AFL-CIO - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Edwards, Donna

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL AFL-CIO

7 School Street • Annapolis, Maryland 21401-2096

Office. (410) 269-1940 • Fax (410) 280-2956

President

Donna S. Edwards

Secretary-Treasurer

Gerald W. Jackson

**SB 556 – Collective Bargaining – Teachers at the Maryland School for the Deaf –
Separate Bargaining Unit
Senate Finance Committee
February 25, 2021**

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 556 – Collective Bargaining – Teachers at the Maryland School for the Deaf – Separate Bargaining Unit. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

Two years ago, this Committee passed a bill, which placed teachers at the School for the Deaf within the State Personnel Management System, effectively making them State Employees. It was necessary to take this measure, because, while informally given a better employment status than “at-will”, they still did not enjoy the same protections under Maryland law that are afforded to other employees in the Professional Service category of the State Personnel Management System (SPMS). The bill eventually passed the full General Assembly and became law in May of 2019, extending these protections to teachers at the Maryland School for the Deaf.

Now it is time to grant these same workers the right to collectively bargain for their pay and benefits, just like State Employees and Employees of the State Board of Education. SB 556 is the enabling legislation to do so. In a recent Executive Order, President Biden reaffirmed the position of the United States on collective bargaining rights by stating “*It is also the policy of the United States to encourage union organizing and collective bargaining.*”¹ We believe that the State of Maryland should follow the lead of the United States and do the same for the teachers at the Maryland School for the Deaf.

We ask for a favorable report on SB 556.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/22/executive-order-protecting-the-federal-workforce/>

Written SB 556 MSD CB LH.pdf

Uploaded by: Riley, Denise

Position: FAV

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
SB 556 – Collective Bargaining - Maryland School for the Deaf –
Separate Bargaining Unit
February 25, 2021**

SUPPORT

Chair Kelley and members of the committee, the Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD) employees should be granted the same collective bargaining rights that all other state professional service employees, k-12 teachers and staff have in Maryland. In addition, a collective bargaining agreement is needed to add teachers to the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future career ladder.

MSD is a state-run, k-12 public school. Its diverse, bilingual community provides an “exemplary education to ensure students achieve personal excellence and become responsible lifelong learners.”¹ MSD consists of two campuses and serves students from birth until high school and up to age 21.

Teachers and students use American Sign Language (ASL) for instruction in and out of the classroom including at meals, school sports, and other extra-curricular activities. All students have an Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) and every teacher is part of a team to oversee a students’ education.

Their state status as Professional Service requires advanced knowledge in a field of science or learning and a professional license or advanced degree. The teachers at MSD work in deaf/special education, have master’s degrees and must maintain MSDE certification.

Teachers and staff are members of the local union - Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association, Local 4828/AFT/AFT-Maryland. However, they do not have collective bargaining rights. To be included in the Blueprint along with the rest of k-12 public schools in the state, the faculty and staff at MSD must be allowed to collectively bargain with management, which will govern the terms and conditions of employment.

The faculty members at the Maryland School for the Deaf are highly qualified and specialized professionals, which should be recognized through the Blueprint as all other teachers in the state. This will be accomplished through a collective bargaining agreement.

We urge a favorable report on SB 556.

Marietta English
President

¹ Maryland School for the Deaf website:
https://www.msdc.edu/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1090021&type=d&pREC_ID=1289149

SB 556 Sponsor Amendment

Uploaded by: Young, Ronald

Position: FAV



SB0556/893128/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

08 FEB 21
09:38:59

BY: Senator Young
(To be offered in the Finance Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 556
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 2, strike “**Teachers**” and substitute “**Faculty**”; and in line 4, strike “teachers” and substitute “faculty”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 2, in line 23, after “(f)” insert “**(1) “FACULTY AT THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF” MEANS EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE BEEN GRANTED THE FOLLOWING STATUS BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF:**

(I) AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM COUNSELORS;

(II) AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE SPECIALISTS;

(III) ATHLETIC TRAINERS;

(IV) BEHAVIOR SPECIALISTS;

(V) CLERICAL AIDES;

(VI) DORM COUNSELORS;

(VII) EMPLOYMENT SPECIALISTS;

(VIII) INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY RESOURCE SPECIALISTS;

(Over)

- (IX) LIBRARIANS;**
- (X) LITERACY AND READING SPECIALISTS;**
- (XI) OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS;**
- (XII) ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY SPECIALISTS;**
- (XIII) PHYSICAL THERAPISTS;**
- (XIV) SCHOOL COUNSELORS;**
- (XV) SCHOOL IEP COORDINATORS;**
- (XVI) SCHOOL NURSES;**
- (XVII) SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS;**
- (XVIII) SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS;**
- (XIX) STUDENT SUPPORT SPECIALISTS;**
- (XX) TEACHERS;**
- (XXI) TEACHER AIDES;**
- (XXII) TRANSITION COORDINATORS; AND**

(XXIII) WORK-TO-LEARN SPECIALISTS.

(2) “FACULTY AT THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF” DOES NOT INCLUDE OFFICERS OR SUPERVISORY EMPLOYEES AT THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF.

(G)”.

On page 3, in line 1, strike “(g)” and substitute “**(H)**”; and strike in their entirety lines 7 through 11, inclusive.

On page 4, in line 3, strike “TEACHERS” and substitute “**FACULTY**”.

GuersSB556FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Guers, Jacqueline

Position: FWA

**Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association
Submitted by Jackie Guers, IEP Coordinator at the Maryland School for the Deaf, and
President, AFT Local 4828
SB 556 - Collective Bargaining – Staff – Maryland School for the Deaf
Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 25, 2021**

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Good afternoon madam Chair and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Jackie Guers, and I am the President of, AFT Local 4828, the union for educational staff working at the Maryland School for Deaf. On behalf of the hundreds of public school educators working to teach Maryland's students enrolled at our state's School for the Deaf, I call for a favorable-with-amendments report SB 556, the bill that would grant us the right to engage in collective bargaining, a right that every other public school teacher in the state has.

I have been employed at the Maryland School for the Deaf for almost 14 years, primarily at Columbia Campus. I have taught elementary age students for 9 years in various grade levels. In my tenth year I became the Language Development Specialist who worked primarily with students with significant language and behavioral needs. At the end of my tenth year, I was asked to fill a much needed role as an IEP Coordinator. I have remained an IEP Coordinator for almost four years now. Due to Maryland being parent choice, our school takes public school students from very different backgrounds all across the state—some who have been at the school since they were three years old, and some who have joined us later in middle or the high school years at the Frederick Campus. I graduated from Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania with a Master of Science degree in Deaf Education in 2007. I am state-certified: all of our teachers at the school must have the same credentials and follow the same licensure standards as any other public school teacher in Maryland, and we also must follow the curricula established by the state Board of Education. We are just like any other public school teacher in Maryland, but there are important distinctions that set us apart—we are a visual learning environment, using American Sign Language for direct instruction and communication so every child has equal access to language. Also, all of the students we teach are deaf or hard-of-hearing; they may have additional needs too, and every student over the age of three at the School for the Deaf has an IEP. For some reason, our teachers and nonsupervisory faculty do not work under the protections of a collectively bargained union contract. With this bill, we hope to correct that mistake.

Members of the committee, it is an unfortunate truth that our educational staff are part of the very few public school educators that do not enjoy collective bargaining rights. Because of this, the Maryland School for the Deaf has been harmed. While I am proud of the work my colleagues and I do to educate the state's deaf and hard-of-hearing children, we have lost a number of high-quality educators and staff to other schools where the benefits and job protections are more solidified. Just by way of recent example, with the impending passage of Kirwan, which we enthusiastically support, educational staff at the school are unsure if the improvements proposed by that commission will be afforded to us, as many of the improvements proposed must be by law bargained collectively. Passage of this bill will go a long way towards seeing that our school—which provides vital educational services to Maryland's deaf and hard-of-hearing students—will no longer be treated differently than any other public school in the state.

The amendments we are proposing would clarify who is eligible for collective bargaining at the school, making the process available to teachers, aides, specialists, and other non-supervisory staff at the school. Employees who do these jobs at schools in local county school districts have unionization rights, and the amendment we are proposing would bring the Maryland School for the Deaf in line with those school systems.

Again, I urge a favorable-with-amendments report for SB 556. Thank you.

HerzigSB556SWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Herzig, Sara Lee

Position: FWA

Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association
AFT Local 4828
Submitted by Sara Lee Herzig
SB 556 - Collective Bargaining – Staff – Maryland School for the Deaf
Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 25, 2021

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Good afternoon madam Chair and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Sara Lee Herzig and I am the middle school & high school American Sign Language (ASL) Teacher as well as ASL Specialist, AFT Local 4828, the union for educational staff working at the Maryland School for Deaf. On behalf of the hundreds of public school educators working to teach Maryland's students enrolled at our state's School for the Deaf, I call for a favorable-with-amendments report on SB 556, the bill that would grant us the right to engage in collective bargaining, a right that every other public school teacher in the state has.

I have taught in middle school and high school. I have additional responsibilities which includes assessing students when requested on their American Sign Language skills. More and more students are receiving services for ASL. It consumes my time as a teacher and interferes with planning. Many students come from various backgrounds and varying language skills. We serve students from all over the state, not just a local school district or even a county. I am state-certified: all of our teachers at the school must have the same credentials and follow the same licensure standards as any other public school teacher in Maryland, and we also must follow the curricula established by the state Board of Education. The teachers at Maryland School for the Deaf are expected to get Masters in Education/Arts. We are just like any other public school teacher in Maryland, except for three important distinctions. First, all of the students we teach are deaf or hard-of-hearing, therefore we have to be proficient in American Sign Language. Second, all of our students are on Individual Education Plans (IEP) so the teachers are part of the IEP team developing IEPs and attend IEP meetings. Lastly for some reason, our teachers do not work under the protections of a collectively bargained union contract. With this bill, we hope to correct that mistake.

Members of the committee, it is an unfortunate truth that our educational staff are part of the very few public school educators that do not enjoy collective bargaining rights. Because of this, the Maryland School for the Deaf has been harmed. While I am proud of the work my colleagues and I do to educate the state's deaf and hard-of-hearing children, we have lost a number of high-quality educators to other districts where the benefits and job protections are more solidified. Just by way of a recent example, with the impending passage of Kirwan, which we enthusiastically support, educational staff at the school are unsure if the improvements proposed by that commission will be afforded to us, as many of the improvements proposed must be by law bargained collectively. Passage of this bill will go a long way towards seeing that our school—which provides vital educational services to Maryland's deaf and hard-of-hearing students—will no longer be treated differently than any other public school in the state.

The amendments we are proposing would clarify who is eligible for collective bargaining at the school, making the process available to teachers, specialists, and other non-supervisory staff at the school. Employees who do these jobs at schools in local county school districts have unionization rights, and the amendment we are proposing would bring the Maryland School for the Deaf in line with those school systems.

Again, I urge a favorable-with-amendments report SB 556. Thank you.

Sara Lee Herzig

HillsSB556FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Hill, Deborah

Position: FWA

**Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association
AFT Local 4828**

**Submitted by Deborah Hill, Vice President, for Columbia Campus
SB 556 - Collective Bargaining – Staff – Maryland School for the Deaf
Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 25, 2021**

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Good afternoon madam Chair and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Deborah Hill. I am a 30+ year employee at Columbia Campus. I have assumed various roles over the year and now my 5th year as an Elementary Department “secretary” but classified as a clerical aide. I used to be a teacher’s aide for over 15 years and also an RCYCP which was called Dorm Counselor back then. I am currently the Vice President for AFT Local 4828, the union for educational staff working at the Maryland School for Deaf. On behalf of the hundreds of public school educators working to teach Maryland’s students enrolled at our state’s School for the Deaf, I call for a favorable-with-amendments report on SB 556, the bill that would grant us the right to engage in collective bargaining, a right that every other public school teacher in the state has.

Through years of experience, it pains me to see our employees not getting step increases when they are overly due for it. The dedicated/committed staff invests so much time to prepare materials and lessons to comply with the adopted curriculum of Frederick County and to make sure they fit for each student in the class. Students’ levels vary and it is challenging for many of our teachers/staff to adapt their work to meet the needs of students. When I mentioned materials, we often pay from our pockets because the supplies are limited at the school. Many of our students come to the school with limited language. MSD is the place where they acquire the language because our staff are qualified ASL users and we provide that language accessibility. ASL is a language which staff must have if they work at MSD. Newly hired staff receive more pay than some of our veteran teachers. That does not justify it accurately. The faculty employees are given a paying job which should be commensurate with years of employment and experience. We cannot afford to lose our people. They deserve professional respect. Without us, the Deaf/Hard of hearing students would go back to the county and they would be lost. Our students NEED us! I am nearing retirement and for so long, I have and still work two jobs. I would love to travel and enjoy my years ahead of me. But, I will be honest with you - I am afraid because I have not had a step increase in so long.

My daughter graduated in 2019 from college with a BA majoring in Social Work and is currently a contractual employee as a teacher’s aide at Columbia Campus. She does not have a pension. She is now considering a second job just to help defray the cost of healthcare and to be able to save. My daughter has

a large student loan debt to worry about. I truly hope she will have a much better experience than mine. With this bill, I hope to correct that mistake.

Members of the committee, it is an unfortunate truth that our educational staff are part of the very few public school educators that do not enjoy collective bargaining rights. Because of this, the Maryland School for the Deaf has been harmed. While I am proud of the work my colleagues and I do to educate the state's Deaf/hard-of-hearing children, we have lost a number of highly qualified educators to the counties where the benefits and job protections are more solidified. Just by way of a recent example, with the impending passage of Kirwan, which we enthusiastically support, educational staff at the school are unsure if the improvements proposed by that commission will be afforded to us, as many of the improvements proposed must be by law bargained collectively. Passage of this bill will go a long way towards seeing that our school—which provides vital educational services to Maryland's deaf and hard-of-hearing students—will no longer be treated differently than any other public school in the state.

The amendments we are proposing would clarify who is eligible for collective bargaining at the school, making the process available to teachers, specialists, and other non-supervisory staff at the school. Employees who do these jobs at schools in local county school districts have unionization rights, and the amendment we are proposing would bring the Maryland School for the Deaf in line with those school systems.

Again, I urge a favorable-with-amendments report for SB 556. Thank you so much.

JohnstonSB556SWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Johnston, Edna

Position: FWA

Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association

AFT Local 4828

Submitted by Edna Johnston, Member of AFT Union at

Maryland School for the Deaf, Frederick Campus

SB 556 - Collective Bargaining – Staff – Maryland School for the Deaf

Before the Senate Finance Committee

February 25, 2021

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Good afternoon madam Chair and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Edna Johnston, an American Sign Language (ASL) teacher and a member of AFT Local 4828, the union for educational staff working at the Maryland School for Deaf. On behalf of the hundreds of public school educators working to teach Maryland's students enrolled at our state's School for the Deaf, I call for a favorable-with-amendments report on SB 556, the bill that would grant us the right to engage in collective bargaining, a right that every other public school teacher in the state has.

As an alum of this cherished school, I am in my 15th year as a faculty at Maryland School for the Deaf-Frederick. In the first eight years, I taught High School English as a Highly Qualified (state certified) teacher- Composition, American Literature (my favorite), World Literature, Grammar, Comparative Linguistics (ASL and English), and Reading and Writing as a Process. Each subject was taught at three levels at one time or another- remedial, merit, and honors. This meant three different types of curriculum for the same content. No easy feat. Taking a break from the additional load of doing IEPs (Individualized Education Plan) for each student that I taught, I transferred to the Early Childhood Education (ECE) department for two years to work with deaf toddlers which I enjoyed since I was always fascinated with language development. That was when I became Highly Qualified in ECE and took six credits worth of classes related to childhood education. When a teacher transferred to the English department, I requested and was given a transfer to the ASL department where I have been the last five years. My co-worker and I are the only ASL teachers in high school and we each also teach a middle school (MS) class in ASL Literature because they do not have ASL teachers. We each teach ASL Linguistics and ASL Literature in High School which are required courses. Every summer, my co-worker and I work together on revamping and expanding the ASL curriculum for K-12 often for a small stipend or even without pay. We also spend tons of money out of our pockets on ASL videos, curriculum subscriptions, and conferences that are not covered by the school. We do this because we are passionate about what we do.

The faculty at the Maryland School for the Deaf are credentialed teachers in a number of fields. For example, I am APC certified which means I have an Advanced Professional Certificate in English and ECE. My post-secondary degrees include the following: Administration and Supervision: Educational Specialist (EdS- MA+ 30), Master of Arts in Deaf Education (presently known as Bilingual Education: ASL and English), Bachelor of Science in ASL Studies and Bachelor of Arts in English: Literature. In addition to these degrees, I am ASLPI- certified which means I have the skills necessary to evaluate students (and even staff) on their ASL. ASLPI stands for ASL Proficiency Interview which is based on the LPI- a very high standard used in the military to measure levels of fluency in a target language. That aside, I am also nationally certified by the ASL Teachers Association as a Master ASL teacher. This well-respected organization offers two levels of mastery in ASL pedagogy- Certified or Master. The organization provides certification to "ensure that teachers possess the skills and knowledge to teach ASL and the culture of the US Deaf community". Needless to say, I am overqualified as a teacher. I teach

because I truly care about my students. Hundreds of my co-workers are just like me. They are overqualified and underpaid.

MSD, as it is known in ASL, is a unique school because it is a bilingual community that serves all kinds of deaf students from infancy to 21. Students vary in their hearing levels- some are hard of hearing and rely on a more Englishy structure of ASL with more “Englishy” mouthing and some are profoundly deaf (like myself) who do not speak a word from the mouth but are very fluent in ASL. The degrees of bilingualism vary as well. Most of our bilingual students are ASL-dominant, English-dominant, or balanced. Few are semi-linguals and they usually come from non-signing families and therefore are language deprived. Many of them also come to MSD with a co-morbid gene. This means when one has an impaired gene (the lack of hearing for instance), there is often another impairment present- some at birth and some developed as a result of language deprivation which impacts one’s socio-emotional well-being. Some of the issues that our students may have include: anxiety, depression, reading disorders, ADHD, ASD (autism spectrum disorder), SPD (Sensory Perception Disorder), ODD (oppositional defiant disorder). Also, there are reading disorders due to language deprivation or co-morbidity as well as ASL disorders (i.e. grammar and production). This is with the deaf (and hard of hearing) students. We also teach students with special needs who require a higher level of expertise- being able to break down concepts into smaller units. We also have international students who were denied adequate education in their own countries. Year after year, we graduate a large number of students who go on to college and become productive citizens with specialized knowledge and skills. We also graduate students who become skilled laborers as well. At MSD, everyone works as a team to meet each child’s needs, no matter how diverse.

We are just like any other public school teacher in Maryland. We are different in only two ways- our students are deaf and therefore are bilingual in ASL and English. We also do not have the same protections of a collectively bargained union contract. With this bill, we hope to correct that mistake so our co-workers in all levels of employment at MSD will be protected as well. Our educational staff are part of the very few public school educators that do not enjoy collective bargaining rights. Because of this, the Maryland School for the Deaf has been unfairly harmed. We have lost a number of high-quality educators to other places with better benefits and job protections. We work in Maryland although it is ranked the 50th worst state to retire in. Our retirement accounts receive no matching contributions no matter how small. I personally had my salary frozen for NINE long years so that is more than 100,000 dollars gone. This is why I keep working throughout the year as an adjunct faculty and doing side jobs to support my family of six. Passage of this bill will go a long way towards seeing that our school—which provides vital educational services to Maryland’s deaf and hard-of-hearing students—will no longer be treated differently than any other public school in the state.

The amendments we are proposing would clarify who is eligible for collective bargaining at the school, making the process available to teachers, specialists, and other non-supervisory staff at the school. Employees who do these jobs at schools in local county school districts have unionization rights, and the amendment we are proposing would bring the Maryland School for the Deaf in line with those school systems.

Again, I urge a favorable-with-amendments report for SB 556. Thank you.

Edna F. Johnston, EdS

JosephSB556FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Joseph, Nidhi

Position: FWA

**Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association
AFT Local 4828**

**Submitted by Nidhi Joseph, Elementary School Teacher, Maryland School for the Deaf
SB 556 - Collective Bargaining –Maryland School for the Deaf – Separate Bargaining Unit
Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 25th, 2021**

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Nidhi Joseph, and I am a Second Grade Teacher at the Maryland School for the Deaf, Columbia Campus. Along with the hundreds of public school educators working to teach Maryland's students enrolled at our state's School for the Deaf, I call for a favorable-with-amendments report on SB 556, the bill that would grant us the right to engage in collective bargaining, a right that every other public school teacher in the state has.

I have taught in the Elementary School Department for the past 3 years. I have worked with a diverse group of students in this period. 95% of all deaf and hard of hearing students are born to hearing parents. Only a small fraction of these parents learn and use ASL with their child. As a result, the majority of my students have experienced language deprivation and have severe language delays. Some students have additional learning disabilities, and/or developmental conditions of which deafness is a part. In my instruction, I follow the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards but also develop remedial and enrichment activities to meet each individual student where they are. Doing this requires a strong knowledge of pedagogy and childhood development, countless hours of creating material to support student learning and coordinated collaboration with several other staff members.

I love working with my students and am proud to work at a school that has so many dedicated and talented staff members. Yet, I have seen several key specialist positions remain unfilled and students who desperately need support with their reading and ASL skills go without these essential services. I have seen a number of highly qualified colleagues leave the institution because they are frustrated by the way decisions are made. With such a high turn-over rate, there is a constant flux in policies and programs, which leaves teachers needing to redesign and adapt materials for their individual students, learn to use new programs and work out kinks. This does not make for a smooth or stable learning environment. I question if this is the right environment to foster student learning, and for me to grow as an educator, and I have no say in decisions which directly impact me and my very unique students. As someone who primarily works with students and their families, I feel it is important to have a voice in the decision-making process.

Currently, our classroom and other non-supervisory staff do not work under the protections of a collectively bargained union contract. With this bill, we hope to correct that mistake. Passage of this bill will go a long way towards seeing that our school—which provides vital educational services to Maryland's deaf and hard-of-hearing students—will no longer be treated differently than any other public school in the state.

The proposed amendments would clarify who is eligible for collective bargaining at the school, making the process available to teachers, specialists, and other non-supervisory staff at the school. Employees who do these jobs at schools in local county school districts have unionization rights, and the amendment we are proposing would bring the Maryland School for the Deaf in line with those school systems.

Again, I urge a favorable report for SB 556. Thank you.

RussellSB556.pdf

Uploaded by: Russell, Kristin

Position: FWA

**Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association
AFT Local 4828
Submitted by Kristin Russell, member, AFT Local 4828
SB-556 Collective Bargaining – Staff – Maryland School for the Deaf
Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 25, 2021**

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Good afternoon madam Chair and members of the House Appropriations Committee. My name is Kristin “KC” Russell, and I am the Secretary of AFT Local 4828, the union for educational staff working at the Maryland School for Deaf. On behalf of the hundreds of public school educators working to teach Maryland’s students enrolled at our state’s School for the Deaf, I call for a favorable-with-amendments report on HB 837, the bill that would grant us the right to engage in collective bargaining, a right that every other public school teacher in the state has.

Hired as a licensed audiologist and certified teacher over thirty years ago, I was selected as MSD’s transition coordinator when related laws were passed in the early 1990s. By implementing COMAR required transition services, which are monitored by MSDE, a system was developed to provide “a coordinated set of educational, employment, transportation, and independent living activities to promote movement to post-school outcomes” for every student between the ages of 14 – 21. During the past 25 years, this student-centered system has grown to include a team of educational, employment, and transition personnel that collaborates with numerous businesses, agencies, training programs, and colleges to provide model services to MSD students.

As you know, MSD offers a unique and vibrant environment that provides each student with free access to ASL, their natural language. With the transition process dependent upon a variety of entities, MSD graduates must often navigate communication barriers with outside agency personnel. Such barriers are further compounded when parents or guardians do not use or understand their child’s primary language. In addition, serving students from across the state adds layers of complexity when accessible services span several counties or service regions. Accessing these resources often depends on providing specialized documentation to qualify for the funding needed for such support. This means that MSD staff must develop additional expertise to provide the assistance required to navigate the pathways our students design and follow to their graduation and beyond.

Members of the committee, it is an unfortunate truth that our educational staff are part of the very few public school educators that do not enjoy collective bargaining rights. Because of this, the Maryland School for the Deaf has been harmed. While I am proud of the work my colleagues and I do to educate the state’s hard-of-hearing children, we have lost a number of high-quality educators to other districts where the benefits and job protections are more solidified. Just by way of recent example, with the impending passage of Kirwan, which we enthusiastically support, educational staff at the school are unsure if the improvements proposed by that commission will be afforded to us, as many of the improvements proposed must be by law bargained collectively.

In addition, staff have been reluctant to speak publicly about issues at the school. There have been instances where management decisions regarding programming changes have materially affected the ability for our students to qualify for services after graduation. For fear of being retaliated against, and because of a lack of a voice in the conditions of our employment, some faculty, far too often, feel the pressure to not “rock the boat.” Passage of this bill will go a long way towards seeing that our school—which provides vital educational services to Maryland’s deaf and hard-of-hearing students—will no longer be treated differently than any other public school in the state.

The amendments we are proposing would clarify who is eligible for collective bargaining at the school, making the process available to teachers, specialists, and other non-supervisory staff at the school. Employees who do these jobs at schools in local county school districts have unionization rights, and the amendment we are proposing would bring the Maryland School for the Deaf in line with those school systems.

Again, I urge a favorable report for SB 556. Thank you.

ShankSB556FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Shank, Randy

Position: FWA

**Written Testimony from Maryland School for the Deaf Faculty and Staff Association
Submitted by Randy Shank, Teacher at the Maryland School for the Deaf, and
Member, AFT Local 4828
SB 556 - Collective Bargaining – Staff – Maryland School for the Deaf
Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 25, 2021**

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Good afternoon madam Chair and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Randy Shank, and I've taught for more than 25 years. I started out at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf, transferred to Metro Deaf School in Minnesota and then Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf before coming to Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD). I also have four children who attend MSD. On behalf of the hundreds of public school educators working to teach Maryland's students enrolled at our state's School for the Deaf, I call for a favorable-with-amendments report on SB 556, the bill that would grant us the right to engage in collective bargaining, a right that every other public school teacher in the state has.

When I came to the school in 2014, I was put at the 18-year pay step and equivalent pay on the Maryland Faculty Salary Scale. Since then, I've worked for seven years, taken many courses and professional development opportunities, and became recertified — yet I've only climbed two steps and am now at the 20-year step, despite my seven years at MSD. This isn't an isolated problem. I've also seen many of my coworkers who have worked 10, 15 years, yet they're classified at the five-year step. Unlike nearly every other public school educator in this state, we at the Maryland School for the Deaf do not have a seat at the table when it comes to bargaining a contract that stipulates our salaries, as well as governs our working conditions at the school.

This is a major problem because at MSD, one of the very best in the nation, we have an unusually high turnover among teachers. Given soaring housing prices, whether rental or purchase, the current economic environment, increased cost of living, and many other factors, it is imperative that we have collective bargaining and appropriate pay/step increases to accomplish not only retention, but high-quality teachers, high morale, and the very best in education. MSD is an excellent school, but is sorely lagging in payment and equality among teachers compared to other state schools and agencies, not to mention other Maryland county and public school systems. Passage of HB 837 would be a step in the direction of changing that, allowing us to come together and negotiate a collectively bargained contract with the administration at the school.

The amendments we are proposing would clarify who is eligible for collective bargaining at the school, making the process available to teachers, aides, specialists, and other non-supervisory staff at the school. Employees who do these jobs at schools in local county school districts have unionization rights, and the amendment we are proposing would bring the Maryland School for the Deaf in line with those school systems.

Again, I urge a favorable report for SB 556. Thank you.