



HB 65 - SUPPORT
Maryland County Public Library Systems'
Employee Collective Bargaining Rights

January 31, 2023

Good afternoon, Chairman Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and committee members. My name is Megan Baker and I am a staff member of a library system in Maryland where we do not have the right to form a union and collectively bargain with our employer. I am here today to urge you to support House Bill 65 (HB65).

A week from today, February 7th, will be 18 years that I've been employed at my current library system. And I can honestly say that over the past several years and pre-dating the COVID-19 pandemic, I have witnessed firsthand a severe decline in our working conditions, overall job satisfaction, and employee morale, specifically for non-management employees. What used to be an innovative work environment that operated on a "lead from any position" approach has eroded due to library leadership's lack of respect for its staff, poor communication, failure to properly address staff concerns, and an overall feeling of distrust.

"If you don't like it here, then leave." That is the response that has been given to those of us who have tried to bring our concerns to the attention of library administrators. A significant number of staff have also shared various issues with our Board of Trustees, only to be met with little to no action. Meanwhile, people have indeed left...so many dedicated and talented coworkers who decided to continue their library careers elsewhere.

Non-management staff make up the majority of the library's workforce, yet we currently have no power when it comes to making decisions that directly affect us. Instead, we're expected to trust our library leadership "no questions asked." I believe even just the possibility of having a union will change that. And personally, I'd rather try to fix the parts of my workplace that are broken than leave a job that I love.

A few years ago, some of my colleagues and I heard about Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL) staff's efforts to organize. As we followed their process in the news, many of us felt a real connection to their experiences and this became a glimmer of hope that maybe we could do the same. As is true for many library workers, we really do love our jobs and take a great amount of pride in what we do. Ultimately, we simply want to use our collective voice to improve our workplace.

Last year, we worked with IAM and Delegate Steve Johnson on proposed legislation for our county that was ultimately unsuccessful. While we were all very disappointed and frustrated, we were determined to try again next session.

My coworkers and I are like so many other library workers across Maryland. We love our jobs, we love serving our communities, and building relationships with our customers. We want valued, innovative libraries, just like management. But, for that to happen, the workers need a seat at the table and a voice in the room. We need to feel confident that our ideas and concerns will be heard. A union will give us that confidence and a means to negotiate our working conditions.

As it stands today, there are only four counties in Maryland with legislation in place that enables library workers to unionize. HB65 will remedy this and extend the right to organize to all county-based library workers throughout the state.

Most importantly, passing HB65 will allow all Maryland library workers to make that choice for themselves without having to go through their own legislative process that could potentially take years.

In the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, we are all given the fundamental right of freedom of association. The right to unionize one's workplace is recognized by U.S. Courts as part of that fundamental right. This is not something that should be affected by party politics. Passing HB65 would simply define the necessary steps for staff to unionize SHOULD internal efforts continue to fail. It is a pathway for my coworkers and I, as well as library workers throughout the state, to exercise our Constitutionally protected right if we choose to do so.

And that is what has brought me here today, seeking your assistance. I ask this committee to support library workers throughout this great state by offering a favorable report on HB65.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate your consideration.