

January 14, 2023

Honorable Delegates,

My name is Colleen Martin and though my residence is in Pennsylvania and I am thus not a Maryland voter, my ties to the state run deep. I married into a family with roots in Harford County that span generations and I have been an employee of the Harford County Public Library for almost 20 years. Because I'm one of the few people within HCPL with that kind of tenure, I'm also one of the few who remember what the system was like before the current administration came to power more than a decade ago. I can say unequivocally that the changes these administrators have implemented without staff or public input regarding the way our library operates have been detrimental to our standing in the community. I firmly believe that, had staff been afforded the respect they deserve and empowered to participate in the decision-making process throughout the years, we would not find ourselves in such dire straits. That is why I'm writing to you today, to ask that you support House Bill 0065 – Public Libraries – Collective Bargaining.

HCPL staff have a deep sense of pride in the high level of service we provide to our patrons in all manner of inquiries, but we are being hamstrung in our ability to do our jobs by our own administration. We once had the autonomy to entice people to our individual branches by offering programs and services catered specifically to that community's needs, but those creative freedoms have been taken from us, the tasks centralized and mandated by a small group of people with no library background or experience in program development. Decades upon decades of collective staff knowledge matter for naught – in fact, nearly a quarter of staff (mostly those that work in branches) were recently demoted and told that they had been “overvalued” by the previous administration.

Because of this stifling atmosphere, the system has been hemorrhaging workers, a crisis that predated the COVID-19 pandemic by several years. Employees leave, either through retirement (early or otherwise) or resignation, as quickly as administration can fill vacancies. I cannot stress enough how unusual this is. HCPL used to have a reputation as one of the top library systems not only in the state but in the country, and job openings were rare and highly coveted. The fact that turnover has sky-rocketed as it has in the last ten years and we can no longer count on people staying for any length of time is telling.

The few of us who remain and remember a time before the disastrous changes the current administration has implemented are finding our situations more and more untenable. We have gone to

our Board of Trustees, which ostensibly oversees library operations and the administrators, to ask for help, but they merely pay lip-service to hearing our grievances. We have no true recourse to affect change and instead are told, "If you don't like it here, then leave." But we don't want to leave. We know how vital a public library is to its community; we know what we can accomplish when all branches and departments work in harmony with each other. But the only way to reestablish that equilibrium within Harford County Public Library is to ensure that we employees have a voice. And the only way to ensure that we have a voice is to pass HB0065. Please help us accomplish this.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Colleen Martin

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