

Written Testimony Submitted for the House Appropriations Committee
Testimony of Craig Wallace
HB 609 –The Library Workers Empowerment Act
February 13th, 2024

SUPPORT

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice-Chair Chang, and Members of the House Appropriations:

My name is Craig Wallace, and I am a Building Care Technician at the Edgewater branch of the Anne Arundel County Public Library System. I have been working for AACPL for over twenty-seven years. Building Care Technicians are, in many ways, the first and last defense for the libraries. During Code Red days, we lack sufficient protections to make sure we are safe and cared for. When we raise issues, we speak alone, and so we speak quietly. But at my other job, I am already an AFSCME member, and I see the union difference every day. When I speak there, I do it at the table. Not quietly, but strongly, with the force of my coworkers behind me.

Across the libraries, challenges abound. Whether it is decade-old equipment we rely on to keep the building open, or new employees who need training to get through the day safely, there are significant gaps with our current health and safety practices. We are trying to build and sustain an institution that represents something different to every person that walks through our doors. For children, it is a gateway to a life of learning. For parents, it is a resource outside of school hours. For students, it is a safe place to focus. For the elderly, it is a critical social resource in a time of growing isolation.

But without the staff, it is a building full of paper. Without our pages, the shelves go unstocked. Without our librarians, books don't get checked out. Without our associates, our desks go unmanned. Without collections departments, information departments, IT employees, and all the other departments that keep us moving, we are still just a building.

Without our Building Care Technicians, we wouldn't even have that.

It is the staff that keep our libraries alive and moving. So the staff should have a voice and the staff should have collective bargaining. Please pass HB 609, and give the people that make these places special the rights they deserve.

Craig Wallace
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