

Written Testimony Submitted for the House Appropriations Committee
Testimony of Eliana Holgate
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 Eliana Holgate, and I am a Children's Instructor & Research Specialist at the Elkridge Branch of the Howard County Library System. I wanted to write today to talk about the realities of our libraries. Front-line library staff are the experts on their communities, with whom we interact every day. When all decisions are made at a remove from that direct service, it diminishes the quality and efficiency of what can be offered. It also destroys morale in our branches, which in turn lowers retention rates.

System leaders are often very disconnected from the reality of day-to-day branch operations. They make top-down decisions and dictate updates, while branch staff are put in a position to "make it work" without appropriate support. Our union will give us a voice to help them understand the logistical needs and challenges that are faced when implementing their initiatives.

Many excellent employees who have been frustrated with the way that system leadership operates have left our library system, leading to a loss of institutional knowledge and talent that would serve our community in an outstanding manner. Our union will help us address issues that have driven away wonderful staff. Sometimes staff learn about new initiatives and decisions at the same time as the public with little or no further details about how things will be handled logistically. This makes it difficult to implement, and puts a strain on our staff and system.

We are thrilled that the General Assembly granted collective bargaining rights to Howard County Library employees back in 2013, and I want to see collective bargaining rights expanded to all library employees across the state of Maryland. Collective bargaining gives our concerns a voice, our issues a solution, and our libraries a strong future. Please pass the Library Workers Empowerment Act.

Eliana Holgate
Children's Instructor & Research Specialist
HCLS