

Chairman Barnes and members of the Appropriations Committee:

As a Maryland resident and 19-year employee of Harford County Public Library (HCPL), I urge you to support HB609, the Library Workers Empowerment Act, by providing a favorable report and bring this important piece of legislation to the House floor for a vote.

They say, “third time’s a charm,” and I most definitely hope that this will prove true in this case. You see, this is now the 3rd consecutive legislative session in which this type of enabling legislation has been proposed. This is a big reason why HB609 has been put forth as a statewide bill that would extend collective bargaining rights to all Maryland library workers.

Over the past several years and pre-dating the COVID-19 pandemic, I have witnessed firsthand a severe decline in HCPL’s 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, poor communication, failure to properly address staff concerns, and an overall feeling of distrust.

Decisions are made by Senior Staff with little to no consideration for how staff will specifically be affected. For example, telling staff on a Monday morning that the telework policy has been changed and you are only allowed to work from home one day a week, effective today. Library leadership’s main focus has become attracting and retaining talented employees, but only for management and administrative positions. In November 2019, the results from a long-awaited compensation and classification study were released. These results were used to reconfigure the HCPL payscale so that starting salaries for the top-tier jobs were increased significantly while non-supervisory positions like our support staff (circulation, library associates) were demoted and ultimately told that their jobs were “overvalued by previous administrations.” For an organization that promotes Choose Civility, these type of actions by upper management are quite contradictory.

“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 these issues to the attention of HCPL Administrators. A significant number of staff have also shared various concerns with the Library 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.

And that is what has brought us here seeking your assistance. During the 2021 legislative session, many of us followed Baltimore County Public Library staff’s efforts to pass their legislation and that truly 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.

As part of the 1st Amendment of the Constitution, the right to unionize one’s workplace is recognized by U.S. Courts as a fundamental right. HB609 simply defines the necessary steps for library workers throughout Maryland to unionize **SHOULD WE CHOOSE TO DO SO**. It is a pathway for my coworkers and I to exercise our Constitutionally protected right.

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 a union will change that. And personally, I’d rather try to fix the parts of Harford County Public Library that are broken than leave a job that I love.

I ask this committee to support the library workers of Harford County and throughout the state of Maryland by offering a favorable report on HB609.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Megan Baker.