

Greetings Chairwoman Beidle, Vice-Chair Klausmeier and the members of this committee.

My name is Bridget Fitzgerald. I am an organizer with the Machinists Union. Since 2019, I've been working to help public library staff gain the right to form a union and collectively bargain with their employer.

The Machinists, along with our Maryland labor allies, have heard the experiences of the library systems' frontline public employees. Their stories are rooted in frustration, because they feel their input based on experience is dismissed and their ideas to enhance and improve programming are ignored.

Universally, library staff love the work they do. They are filled with a sense of pride when they can help students find resources, seniors navigate the internet, unemployed people submit job applications and of course create a safe space for members of every community.

To be honest, I'm in awe at how much they do and how much they give. In return, they are asking to be in partnership with management. They want the chance to have a seat at the table and a voice in the workplace. Passing HB 609, doesn't automatically make unorganized library systems union, but it gives staff the opportunity to navigate a consistent and fair process, if they want to try. They will still need to be successful in having a majority of their coworkers wanting a union in order to gain representation – just like workers who organize under other labor laws.

As I said, I started working with library staff in 2019 when Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL) workers expressed an interest in organizing. Today, BCPL has ratified their third contract. They have productive labor management committee meetings on a monthly basis to proactively identify and resolve issues. In addition, BCPL's representational environment provides employees the opportunity and support to reach their full potential. In short, BCPL is a better place to work and the community benefits.

House Bill 609 was amended under the House Appropriates Committee to accommodate the library administration's main concerns. It passed the House with bi-partisan support and now comes before this committee. I hope you will stand with Maryland's Public Library employees by issuing a favorable report on HB 609.

I thank you for your time and welcome any question.