



## **HB 609 - SUPPORT**

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### **HB 609 - SUPPORT Maryland County Public Library Systems' Employee Collective Bargaining Rights**

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My name is Laura Ewan, and I am Associate General Counsel for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM). I am honored to submit this testimony in support of HB 609, a crucial piece of legislation that will grant the employees of many of Maryland's County Public Library Systems the right to select a representative of their choosing to bargain on their behalf for their wages, hours, and working conditions.

In Maryland, each county library system exists as a creature of state statute. State law governing library structure and operations allows for boards of trustees or county governments to operate library systems and set wages, hours, and working conditions. However, the state laws do not automatically grant these entities the right to enter into binding collective bargaining agreements absent a grant of such authority from the legislature. That's what HB 609 would do—grant that authority to each County's library employing authority to enter into a collective bargaining agreement, should the library employees wish to be represented by a union.

For some historical perspective, Prince Georges County Library System and Montgomery County Library System sought this grant of authority in the 1980s and have long-established relationships with unions for their employees. Howard County Library System did the same in the early 2000s, although the employees there did not form a union until this year. Baltimore County's Library System's enabling legislation passed in 2021, and the workers are currently going through their third year of bargaining for their third contract. But having to do this on a county-by-county basis across Maryland is ineffective, inefficient, and ultimately asks for inconsistencies in how Library employees gain representation.

Instead, it just makes sense—for your busy schedules, and for these employees who want to have a union—to address the issue statewide all at once. HB 609 does just that.

This is a common-sense approach that guarantees access to the constitutionally protected right of freedom of association for these workers. HB 609 was drafted with consideration for county budgetary processes and county management structures in Maryland—*and* it was amended to address key concerns from Library system representatives in the House.

HB 609 is a comprehensive and fair bill for all involved.

It is also imperative that the law grant the right for a collective bargaining agreement to include a provision for arbitration of disciplinary actions beyond the Board of Trustees-overseen process already provided for by Maryland law. This allows workers to benefit from having a Union representative during such a harrowing and critical point in their career—defending themselves in light of disciplinary action—in a

way that the Board of Trustees-guided process does not. BCPL employees have gained from being able to negotiate this right into their contract.

Employees who work so hard to provide the numerous services that our libraries offer to the community want a voice in the conversations about the direction of the workplace. They want a seat at the table because they love their jobs. And they want meaningful representation to ensure that it stays that way. That is why we enthusiastically support this bill.

Ultimately, HB 609 strikes a balance between protecting workers' right to freedom of association with the library administration's obligation to manage the library system in a way most appropriate to their individual communities. If their election is successful, HB 609 provides the next steps for negotiating collective bargaining agreement to be ratified by the employees. In reading HB 609, you will note that management retains their right to exercise control and discretion over the library's operations, direct its employees and all that entails, determine the methods, means, personnel and resources, hire, promote, transfer, and so on. And HB 609 imposes deadlines to resolve negotiation issues at impasse in order for collective bargaining agreements to comply with county budgetary processes and timelines. A great deal of research and thought went into drafting HB 609 to ensure that the roles of each party are respected.

Maryland library employees need this bill passed just to have the opportunity to vote to see if they want to have a representative for collective bargaining purposes. Every single library employee we have spoken to sees this as an opportunity to make the job they love even better. These workers provide critical social and cultural services to Maryland residents, and all they ask is for the opportunity to have a collective voice at the table.

We ask you to vote in favor of HB 609 so library employees across Maryland can have the legal right and the freedom to choose whether they wish to be represented by a union or not for the purposes of collective bargaining.

Thank you.