

Testimony in Support of HB 0233

**Labor and Employment – Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters –
Employee Attendance and Participation
(Maryland Worker Freedom Act)**

January 28, 2025

To: Honorable Chair CT Wilson, Vice Chair Brian Crosby, and members of the House Economic
Matters Committee

From: Kayla Mock, Political & Legislative Director

United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 400

Chair Wilson and members of the House Economic Matters Committee, I appreciate the chance to share my testimony on behalf of our over 10,000 members in Maryland, working in grocery, retail, food distribution, cannabis, and health care. Through collective bargaining, our members raise the workplace standards of wages, benefits, safety, and retirement for all workers. Union members are critical to the addressing inequality and uplifting the middle class.

We strongly support HB0233 and urge you to vote it favorably.

According to an Economic Policy Institute article from December 2024 titled, “Tackling the Problem of Captive Audience Meetings: How States are Stepping Up to Protect Workers Rights and Freedoms,” “political and religious coercion in the workplace is a growing problem affecting workers from all backgrounds and across the political spectrum. U.S. employers have tremendous power over worker conduct under current federal laws. For example, employers can require workers to attend “captive audience” meetings—and force employees to listen to political, religious, or anti-union employer views—*on work time*.

Legislatures in 18 states have advanced anti captive audience laws to ensure that workers on the job still have the freedom of choice on attending political and religious meeting on the job site, and six have enacted these laws.

A few things to note:

1. This does not ban employers from holding such meetings. An employer, if they choose, can still hold a meeting for workers on political and religious topics.
2. It gives the worker the right to say no to attending these meetings. In states where captive audience laws are not in place, workers are forced to stay and listen to political and religious rhetoric without the right to say no.
3. All workers without a contract are at-will employees, meaning they can be fired at any time, for any reason. Workers fear retaliation, discipline, and even termination if they refuse to sit in a captive audience meeting.
4. The National Labor Relations Board recently issued a ruling banning captive audience meetings. However, the new Administration has indicated rolling back many of the protections for workers that have been enacted.

We appreciate Maryland's commitment to protect its most vulnerable citizens. And now, we believe those protections should be extended to workers to exercise freedoms in their workplace.

For all of these reasons and more, we urge a favorable report on HB0233.