



Testimony - HB 233, Labor and Employment - Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters - Employee Attendance & Participation (Maryland Worker Freedom Act)

Favorable

House Economic Matters Committee

January 30, 2025

Terrence Cavanagh

On Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairman Wilson and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee:

The members of SEIU Local 500, stand over 23,000 workers strong and express our wholehearted support for House Bill 233, the Maryland Worker Freedom Act. This bill is vital for safeguarding workers' personal beliefs and ensuring that our workplaces remain spaces of mutual respect, free from undue influence.

At its core, HB 233 ensures that employees are not forced to engage in employer-sponsored meetings that address religious or political matters. It is fundamental that individuals retain the right to make their own choices regarding their beliefs without being pressured in the workplace. This bill upholds the principle that employees should not face negative consequences for maintaining their personal convictions, whether they align with their employer's views or not, including their right to form a union in their workplace.

Employers should not use their position of power to impose religious or political views on their employees. Unfortunately, some workplaces may exert undue pressure on employees to attend such meetings, creating a climate of fear or anxiety for those who prefer to keep their personal beliefs private. HB 233 would ensure that employees can feel secure in their right to say "no" without fear of retaliation, whether that means a denial of promotions, disciplinary action, or even being passed over for job opportunities.

Maryland's workplaces should be environments that encourage diverse ideas and perspectives, where employees can focus on their work without the risk of their personal

beliefs being used against them. By passing this bill, we can help ensure that Maryland's workplaces continue to be inclusive, where employees are valued for their skills and contributions, rather than their political or religious affiliations.

No individual should feel compelled to disclose or discuss their personal beliefs in a work setting, especially when such disclosure could lead to discrimination or retaliation. This bill safeguards that right, ensuring that employees are not forced into situations where their private lives are scrutinized or judged based on their participation in employer-sponsored meetings on these sensitive matters.

This legislation will help protect workers from discriminatory practices that could stem from disagreements with an employer's political or religious views. As we know, such beliefs can be deeply personal, and it is crucial that workers are not penalized simply because they disagree with their employer's opinions. HB 233 promotes fairness and equity in the workplace, helping to prevent discrimination based on personal convictions.

The Maryland Worker Freedom Act (HB 233) is an essential step toward ensuring that employees are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their political or religious beliefs. By prohibiting employers from taking adverse actions against employees or applicants for choosing not to attend employer-sponsored meetings on these topics, we protect workers' autonomy and privacy. This bill helps foster a more inclusive, fair, and respectful work environment across the state and helps ensure that Maryland remains a leader in worker protections.

We strongly urge the members of this committee to support House Bill 233 and ask for a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Terrence Cavanagh
On Behalf of SEIU Local 500