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Maryland House of Delegates
Economic Matters Committee
Room 231
Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

January 30, 2025

Chair Wilson and Members of the Committee:

Americans approve of and want to join a union – the evidence is clear. In an era of extreme income inequality, economic uncertainty, and the COVID-19 pandemic proving that all essential work should be valued accordingly – unions are viewed more favorably now than at any point in the last 57 years. However, even with union support at 70% across America in recent Gallup polling and 53% of all workers saying they would join a union if they could, workers still struggle to form unions.¹

Between anti-worker laws and weak employer penalties for violating existing laws, workers are fearful to exercise their right to stand with their coworkers and negotiate a fair contract with their employer. One major reason for this fear is the nearly half-a-billion-dollar union busting industry, where employers spend nearly \$340 million per year hiring “union avoidance advisers”, better known as “union busters.”²

One major tactic used by “union busters” is the “captive audience” meeting, which forces workers to listen to the political opinions of their bosses in closed-door, mandatory meetings during work hours. Under the threat of workplace discipline or termination, workers must attend and listen to their bosses and these highly paid consultants mischaracterize unions.

HB 233, the Maryland Worker Freedom Act, protects workers and their first amendment free speech rights by allowing workers to ***not*** participate in mandatory work meetings where the

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2023/08/29/majority-of-americans-support-labor-unions-poll-finds/70713278007/>

² <https://www.epi.org/publication/unlawful-employer-opposition-to-union-election-campaigns/>

topic is the employer's political or religious position. The bill states that any employer shall not threaten discipline or terminate a worker who chooses not to participate in meetings or view communications concerning political or religious matters.

It is important to note that the bill is broader than just whether or not to join a union. Some of these issues include, but are not limited to, voicing support for or opposition to political candidates, legislation and campaigns; promoting religious practices or affiliations, and; discussing membership in a civic, community, or labor organization.

In Connecticut, a similar law was passed in 2022, with support from the state's Attorney General, who testified that the bill was beyond the reach of federal preemption and that the U.S. Supreme Court has expressly recognized that the First Amendment permits government to protect the interest of an unwilling listener who cannot avoid speech [(Hill v. Colorado, 530 U.S. 703, 716-17 (2000); Frisby v. Schultz, 487 U.S. 474, 487 (1988)].³ Since then, similar bills have been signed into law in Minnesota, Maine, New York, Washington, Illinois, Vermont, Hawaii, and California. This past November, a similar bill was approved by voters in a ballot initiative in Alaska. With this bill, Maryland has the opportunity to join these states in being an outspoken defender of individual rights in the workplace.

I urge you to stand up of working Marylanders by voting 'yes' on HB 233 when it comes before the Committee.

Respectfully,



Sean Cedenio, President
Teamsters Joint Council 62

³ <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2022/JUDdata/Tmy/2022SB-00163-R000304-Tong,%20William,%20Attorney%20General-State%20of%20Connecticut-TMY.PDF>