



Statement of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689

HB 233 - Maryland Worker Freedom Act
January 28th, 2025

TO: The Honorable C.T. Wilson and Members of the Economic Matters Committee
FROM: Matthew Girardi, Political and Communications Director, ATU Local 689

ATU Local 689 strongly supports HB 233 and urges this Committee to issue a favorable report. This bill is a necessary measure to secure workers' rights and give power to working class people in Maryland.

At Local 689, we represent over 15,000 transit workers and retirees throughout the Washington DC Metro Area. performing many skilled transportation crafts for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), MetroAccess, DASH, and DC Streetcar among others. Our union helped turn low-wage, exploitative transit jobs into transit careers. We became an engine for the middle-class of this region.

Throughout our union's history, we have unfortunately had to fight tooth and nail to get fairness for our members. Be it a living wage, a secure retirement system, quality health insurance, or stable hours, Local 689 has been on the front lines of the fights to bring a decent quality of life to blue-collar workers. However, we know all too well that companies will play dirty tricks like using captive audience meetings to scare workers into supporting their agenda. This must stop.

HB 233, the Maryland Worker Freedom Act, is an incredible vehicle for us to do so. It would make sure that workers are not forced to attend these meetings where company political, religious, or labor relations views are forced on them and are able to leave without fear of reprisal. We know that democracy is not just a philosophy, it is an action. Workers who have their own beliefs, be them political, religious, or about whether to join with their coworkers to collectively bargain, should not be forced to sit idly by and accept those of their employers.

Sadly, the Union knows that this was all too common. In fact, according to a 2015 survey, one in four workers had been directly contacted by their employer on political matters. Of those, 20% had been directly threatened with changes to wages, hours, or even employment status¹. Additionally, these forced meetings are used to coerce employees into voting against Unions. The NLRB found that captive audience meetings are used in response to 89% of unionization drivers and have had a profoundly chilling effect on the results of these efforts to unionize². Likewise, these meetings can be used to target particularly vulnerable workers, including Black, brown, immigrant, disabled, young, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Thankfully, the federal government under the Biden administration made these meetings illegal. However, in the face of a much less pro-worker administration, the rule that banned them faces deep threat. It is incumbent on Maryland to be a leader and ensure that these tactics never return to our state, no matter who sits in the White House.

¹ Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, "How Employers Recruit Their Workers into Politics—and Why Political Scientists Should Care," *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 2 (June 2016): 410–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592716000098>.

² *NO HOLDS BARRED: The Intensification of Employer Opposition to Organizing* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2009).

At Local 689 we represent people from all backgrounds, religions, races, sexual orientations, and political views. One shouldn't have to adhere to one political ideology or religion to work in transit. In fact, it is better that one does not. Serving the riding public means serving everyone who walks onto your van, shuttle, bus, or train. Workers should not be beholden to management's political, religious, or labor management views, because frankly, that is not their job. It is their job to move people, and should they decide to form a Union, they should be free to do so without coercion.

The Union thanks Delegate Vogel for introducing this worthy measure and urges the committee to issue a favorable report.