



# METROPOLITAN BALTIMORE COUNCIL AFL-CIO Unions

**HB 604 Arbitration Reform for State Employees Act of 2026**  
**Government, Labor, and Elections Committee**  
**March 6th, 2026**  
**Favorable**

To: Chair & members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

From: Courtney Jenkins, President, Metropolitan Baltimore Council AFL CIO Unions

Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Courtney Jenkins, President of the Metro Baltimore AFL CIO, representing thousands of union members and working families across our region. The Metro Baltimore AFL CIO strongly supports House Bill 604.

This legislation addresses a fundamental flaw in Maryland's current collective bargaining framework for state and higher education employees. Right now, there are no clear timelines for the commencement or conclusion of negotiations. When talks stall, the only formal impasse procedure available is factfinding, a non-binding process that ultimately allows management to impose its preferred outcome. That structure does not incentivize good faith bargaining, and it leaves workers without meaningful leverage.

House Bill 604 creates a fair, structured process that promotes accountability on both sides. By establishing a defined negotiation window and allowing unresolved impasses to move to binding interest arbitration, the bill ensures that disputes are resolved in a timely and balanced manner. Binding arbitration requires both parties to present evidence and arguments before a neutral arbitrator, who then issues a written, binding decision. That is a fair, orderly alternative when negotiations break down.

It is important to remember that Maryland state and higher education employees do not have the right to strike. Unlike public employees in many other states, these workers cannot withhold their labor to resolve an impasse. Binding interest arbitration is not an extreme measure; it is a necessary tool to balance a system where one side currently holds disproportionate power. Many states use binding arbitration for some or all public employees, and here in Maryland, educators and numerous local government workers already have access to it. Just this past October, the Anne Arundel County Council passed Binding Arbitration by a unanimous 7-0 vote.



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In December 2025 the Harford County Council overwhelmingly adopted legislation to provide public employees of the county the right to binding arbitration in their grievance procedure. Extending this right to state and higher education employees simply brings fairness and consistency to our labor framework.

When workers have access to a fair dispute resolution process, negotiations are more productive, contracts are stronger, and labor/management relationships are more stable. That stability benefits not only employees, but also the public institutions and communities they serve.

It is time for Maryland to provide state and higher education employees with a balanced and meaningful path to resolve bargaining disputes. For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 604.

Thank you for your consideration.

Courtney Jenkins  
President  
Metropolitan Baltimore Council AFL CIO