

**DEBBIE MICHAELS
PO BOX 1611
WESTMINSTER, MD 21158**

Written Testimony

HB 604

Arbitration Reform for
State Employees Act of 2026
FAVORABLE

I have worked at UMBC as support staff for seventeen years, have served as the president of our workers union since 2014 and am a USM/AFSCME MOU bargaining team member. I want to bring to your attention some of the reasons why binding arbitration is so important and would benefit both the USM, the state and the unions that negotiate with them.

During our negotiations on the MOU that was ratified in July 2024, we met multiple times over a 2-year period. At all of these meetings, there was a minimum of one, often times two representatives from the universities HR and Labor Management staff and USM administrators, each earning generous six figure salaries. Additionally, there was the union team, with much more modest salaries, averaging around 50k. Moreover, there is the expense of USM's legal counsel, which does not come cheap. I bring this up to highlight that there is a cost when negotiations are unnecessarily dragged out on impasse.

Not only did USM delay starting negotiating the consolidated contract for eight months, these negotiations should not have taken as long as they did once we began. We were not starting from scratch. We already had multiple contracts in place with very similar language. This was a matter of blending these contracts, updating wording to clarify the intent of the agreements, and making much needed improvements to benefit both parties.

Though fact-finding is a current option, should we proceed with this step, there is no guarantee of a satisfactory outcome. Additionally, we must tighten up timelines for such negotiations. Continuing to meet multiple times, without moving to sign tentative agreements, is a waste of time to everyone at the table and expensive in terms of achieving nothing for all that time spent.

Binding arbitration would help resolve many of these expensive issues by compelling both parties to come together in an efficient manner prior to needing to escalate the process. Should the need arise and an impasse is not resolved, a third party review can assess all the facts and provide an unbiased binding solution.

Thank you for your consideration to support HB 604.

Sincerely,

Debbie Michaels
President, AFSCME Local 1459
University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)