

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
HB 604
Arbitration Reform for State Employees Act of 2026
March 6, 2026
SUPPORT**

Good afternoon, Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee. AFT-Maryland is the state federation for a number of public K-12 education, public higher education, and public employee unions in our state, representing over 20,000 employees in the Baltimore Teachers Union, the Maryland Classified Employees Association, county and municipal government employees in Baltimore City and Baltimore County, the full-time faculty at eight of the state's community colleges, and state employees in the Maryland Professional Employees Council (state employees in Unit G), AFT Healthcare-Maryland (state employees in Unit E), Maryland Classified Employees Association (representing staff at Salisbury University and UMCES), and the Maryland School for the Deaf (state employees in Unit K). On behalf of these workers, and especially the 4 state employee unions this bill would benefit, we call for a favorable report to HB 604, the bill that would ensure a fair bargaining process in contract negotiations between the Governor and the state's workforce.

During the last three years of bargaining, our unions have had an amicable, professional, and productive relationship with the administration, engaging in a real, good faith exchange of ideas to resolve problems our employees face in various state agencies. Each of our unions have every year come to an agreement with management on a collective bargaining agreement. Our support of this bill should not be seen as an indictment of that relationship; rather, our unions realize that sometimes those relationships can change depending on who occupies these offices in the future, and that an objective process to resolve disputes at the bargaining table is in the best interest of the state and its employees. What this bill would do is create a rational process by which impasses during contract negotiations may be resolved. Additionally, even offering the potential for either side to request an arbitrator whose decision regarding an impasse at bargaining will further advance and ensure that each side will be working in good faith to come to a resolution at the bargaining table.

In Maryland, binding arbitration is already the norm for a large number of public sector employees. All local K12 public school systems in the state have the right to binding arbitration if contract negotiations come to an impasse, as do a number of municipal and county employee

unions in their negotiations with management. Even a sector of state employees working within the State Department of Transportation have access to binding arbitration. We must note, however, that while the local K12 School districts and their unions do utilize binding arbitration, because it is a state school, the negotiations between the teachers and staff union and the administration at the Maryland School for the Deaf do not have this right. Let us correct this error and bring a level of objectivity and fairness to the collective bargaining system to the rest of state employees by passing HB 604.