

SENATE BILL 417

K3

6lr1984
CF HB 45

By: **Senator Lam**

Introduced and read first time: January 29, 2026

Assigned to: Finance

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Labor and Employment – Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political**
3 **Matters – Employee Attendance and Participation**
4 **(Maryland Worker Freedom Act)**

5 FOR the purpose of prohibiting employers and their agents, representatives, and designees
6 from taking certain actions against an employee or applicant for employment
7 because the employee or applicant takes certain actions regarding
8 employer-sponsored meetings during which the employer communicates the opinion
9 of the employer regarding religious matters or political matters; authorizing an
10 employee to file a certain complaint with the Commissioner of Labor and Industry;
11 authorizing the Commissioner to take certain actions related to violations of certain
12 provisions of this Act; requiring employers to notify the employer's employees in a
13 certain manner of the requirements and protections provided under certain
14 provisions of this Act; requiring the Commissioner to develop and make available a
15 certain poster and model notice; and generally relating to employee attendance and
16 participation in employer meetings on religious or political matters.

17 BY adding to
18 Article – Labor and Employment
19 Section 3–718
20 Annotated Code of Maryland
21 (2025 Replacement Volume)

22 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
23 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

24 **Article – Labor and Employment**

25 **3–718.**

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.

(2) "POLITICAL MATTERS" MEANS MATTERS RELATING TO:

(I) ELECTIONS FOR POLITICAL OFFICE;

(II) POLITICAL PARTIES;

(III) PROPOSALS TO CHANGE:

1. LEGISLATION;

2. REGULATIONS; OR

3. PUBLIC POLICY; OR

(IV) THE DECISION TO JOIN OR SUPPORT A POLITICAL PARTY OR POTENTIAL CIVIC, COMMUNITY, FRATERNAL, OR LABOR ORGANIZATION.

(3) "RELIGIOUS MATTERS" MEANS MATTERS RELATING TO RELIGIOUS BELIEF, AFFILIATION, AND PRACTICE OR THE DECISION TO JOIN AND SUPPORT A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION OR ASSOCIATION.

(B) THIS SECTION DOES NOT APPLY TO AN EMPLOYER THAT:

(1) IS A RELIGIOUS CORPORATION, ORGANIZATION, OR ASSOCIATION OR AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION OR SOCIETY THAT IS EXEMPT FROM THE REQUIREMENTS OF TITLE VII OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 UNDER 42 U.S.C. § 2000E-1(A) OR IS EXEMPT FOR EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION PROTECTIONS UNDER STATE LAW;

(2) IS A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION THAT REQUIRES ITS EMPLOYEES TO ATTEND AN EMPLOYER-SPONSORED MEETING OR TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE EMPLOYER OR THE EMPLOYER'S AGENTS OR OTHER REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATING THE EMPLOYER'S POLITICAL TENETS OR PURPOSES;

(3) IS AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION THAT REQUIRES A STUDENT OR AN INSTRUCTOR TO ATTEND LECTURES ON POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS MATTERS AS PART OF THE REGULAR COURSEWORK AT THE INSTITUTION;

1 (4) IS A NONPROFIT, TAX-EXEMPT TRAINING PROGRAM THAT
2 REQUIRES A STUDENT OR AN INSTRUCTOR TO ATTEND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION,
3 COMPLETE FIELDWORK, OR PERFORM COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS ON POLITICAL
4 OR RELIGIOUS MATTERS AS IT RELATES TO THE MISSION OF THE TRAINING
5 PROGRAM;

6 (5) REQUIRES EMPLOYEES TO UNDERGO TRAINING TO COMPLY WITH
7 FEDERAL OR STATE LAW, INCLUDING TRAINING RELATED TO THE EMPLOYER'S
8 OBLIGATIONS UNDER CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS AND OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH
9 LAWS; OR

10 (6) IS A GOVERNMENTAL UNIT HOLDING A NEW EMPLOYEE
11 ORIENTATION.

12 (C) AN EMPLOYER, OR THE EMPLOYER'S AGENT, REPRESENTATIVE, OR
13 DESIGNEE, MAY NOT:

14 (1) DISCHARGE, DISCIPLINE, OR OTHERWISE PENALIZE OR
15 THREATEN TO DISCHARGE, DISCIPLINE, OR OTHERWISE PENALIZE AN EMPLOYEE
16 BECAUSE THE EMPLOYEE DECLINES TO ATTEND, PARTICIPATE IN, OR LISTEN TO
17 COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE EMPLOYER, OR THE EMPLOYER'S AGENT,
18 REPRESENTATIVE, OR DESIGNEE, IN AN EMPLOYER-SPONSORED MEETING DURING
19 WHICH THE EMPLOYER COMMUNICATES THE OPINION OF THE EMPLOYER
20 REGARDING RELIGIOUS MATTERS OR POLITICAL MATTERS; OR

21 (2) FAIL OR REFUSE TO HIRE AN APPLICANT FOR EMPLOYMENT AS A
22 RESULT OF THE APPLICANT'S REFUSAL TO ATTEND OR PARTICIPATE IN AN
23 EMPLOYER-SPONSORED MEETING DURING WHICH THE EMPLOYER COMMUNICATES
24 THE OPINION OF THE EMPLOYER REGARDING RELIGIOUS MATTERS OR POLITICAL
25 MATTERS.

26 (D) THIS SECTION DOES NOT PROHIBIT AN EMPLOYER:

27 (1) FROM COMMUNICATING INFORMATION THAT THE EMPLOYER IS
28 REQUIRED BY LAW TO COMMUNICATE;

29 (2) FROM CONDUCTING A MEETING THAT INVOLVES RELIGIOUS
30 MATTERS OR POLITICAL MATTERS IF ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION ARE
31 VOLUNTARY;

32 (3) FROM COMMUNICATING TO ITS EMPLOYEES INFORMATION THAT
33 IS NECESSARY FOR ITS EMPLOYEES TO PERFORM THEIR JOB DUTIES;

(4) THAT IS AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION, OR AN AGENT OR OTHER REPRESENTATIVE OR DESIGNEE OF THE INSTITUTION, FROM MEETING WITH OR PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNICATIONS WITH ITS EMPLOYEES THAT ARE PART OF COURSEWORK, A SYMPOSIUM, OR AN ACADEMIC PROGRAM AT THE INSTITUTION; OR

(5) THAT IS A GOVERNMENTAL UNIT FROM COMMUNICATING TO ITS EMPLOYEES INFORMATION RELATED TO A POLICY OF THE EMPLOYER OR A LAW THAT THE EMPLOYER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING.

(E) (1) IF AN EMPLOYEE BELIEVES THAT AN EMPLOYER HAS VIOLATED THIS SECTION, WITHIN 180 DAYS AFTER THE ALLEGED VIOLATION, THE EMPLOYEE MAY FILE A WRITTEN COMPLAINT WITH THE COMMISSIONER.

(2) AFTER RECEIVING A WRITTEN COMPLAINT FILED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION, THE COMMISSIONER SHALL CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION AND ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE INFORMALLY THROUGH MEDIATION.

(3) IF THE COMMISSIONER IS UNABLE TO RESOLVE AN ISSUE THROUGH MEDIATION AND, AFTER AN INVESTIGATION, THE COMMISSIONER DETERMINES THAT THE EMPLOYER HAS VIOLATED THIS SECTION, THE COMMISSIONER MAY ASSESS A CIVIL PENALTY OF:

(I) FOR AN INITIAL VIOLATION, UP TO \$10,000; OR

(II) FOR A SUBSEQUENT VIOLATION, UP TO \$25,000.

(4) IN ADDITION TO CIVIL PENALTIES ASSESSED UNDER PARAGRAPH (3) OF THIS SUBSECTION, THE COMMISSIONER MAY:

(I) ISSUE AN ORDER TO CEASE AND DESIST FROM THE VIOLATION AND ANY FURTHER SIMILAR VIOLATIONS; OR

(II) AWARD ANY OTHER RELIEF THAT THE COMMISSIONER DETERMINES IS APPROPRIATE, INCLUDING:

1. INJUNCTIVE RELIEF;
2. COMPENSATORY DAMAGES;
3. AFFIRMATIVE RELIEF, INCLUDING:

1 **A. THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE EMPLOYEE TO THE**
2 **EMPLOYEE’S FORMER POSITION OR AN EQUIVALENT POSITION;**

3 **B. BACK PAY AND INTEREST AMOUNTS OWED; OR**

4 **C. RESTORATION OF EMPLOYEE BENEFITS, PENSION OR**
5 **RETIREMENT ACCRUAL, AND OTHER TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT FOR**
6 **WHICH THE EMPLOYEE WOULD HAVE BEEN ELIGIBLE; OR**

7 **4. REASONABLE ATTORNEY’S FEES AND OTHER COSTS.**

8 **(5) THE COMMISSIONER MAY FILE A PETITION IN ANY CIRCUIT**
9 **COURT FOR ANY COUNTY SEEKING ENFORCEMENT OF AN ORDER UNDER THIS**
10 **SECTION.**

11 **(F) (1) EACH EMPLOYER SHALL NOTIFY THE EMPLOYER’S EMPLOYEES**
12 **OF THE REQUIREMENTS AND PROTECTIONS PROVIDED UNDER THIS SECTION BY:**

13 **(I) POSTING THE POSTER OR NOTICE DEVELOPED UNDER**
14 **PARAGRAPH (2) OF THIS SUBSECTION IN A PLACE WHERE EMPLOYEE NOTICES ARE**
15 **CUSTOMARILY POSTED OR IN ANOTHER CONSPICUOUS PLACE ACCESSIBLE BY ALL**
16 **EMPLOYEES OF THE EMPLOYER; AND**

17 **(II) PROVIDING THE NOTICE DEVELOPED UNDER PARAGRAPH**
18 **(2) OF THIS PARAGRAPH TO EACH NEW EMPLOYEE ON HIRING.**

19 **(2) (I) THE COMMISSIONER SHALL DEVELOP AND MAKE**
20 **AVAILABLE TO EMPLOYERS A POSTER AND MODEL NOTICE THAT SUMMARIZES THE**
21 **RIGHTS ESTABLISHED UNDER THIS SECTION, INCLUDING HOW TO FILE A**
22 **COMPLAINT WITH THE COMMISSIONER.**

23 **(II) THE POSTER AND MODEL NOTICE DEVELOPED UNDER**
24 **SUBPARAGRAPH (I) OF THIS PARAGRAPH SHALL BE MADE AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH**
25 **AND ANY OTHER LANGUAGES COMMONLY USED BY EMPLOYEES IN THE STATE.**

26 **(3) THE COMMISSIONER SHALL CONSIDER FAILURE TO COMPLY**
27 **WITH THE NOTICE REQUIREMENT ESTABLISHED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS**
28 **SUBSECTION AN AGGRAVATING FACTOR WHEN AWARDING RELIEF UNDER**
29 **SUBSECTION (E) OF THIS SECTION.**

30 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That the Commissioner of Labor
31 and Industry shall develop and make available the poster and model notice required under
32 § 3–718(f)(2) of the Labor and Employment Article, as enacted by Section 1 of this Act, on
33 or before November 1, 2026.

1 SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
2 October 1, 2026.