

Testimony of Relford Matthews, AFSCME Local 1833
HB 641 – Collective Bargaining – Chancellor of the University System of Maryland –
Negotiations
Appropriations
February 25, 2020
Support

Good afternoon members of the committee. My name is Relford Matthews Sr., I am a Maintenance Mechanic at University of Maryland Eastern Shore and it is also my Alma mater.

I come to you today in strong support of HB 641. We need this bill to pass so that we can actually bargain wages with the employer who sets the guidelines for pay, the University System of Maryland.

UMES is located in Somerset County, the second poorest county in the state. UMES is the second largest employer in the county, yet some of my co-workers are on public assistance with poverty wages. They are not alone within the University System. AFSCME has members working at College Park – a billion-dollar institution in Prince Georges County – also on food stamps. We have members working at the University of Baltimore not able to make ends meet.

This is a system-wide problem. Did you know all the University System schools are exempt from local minimum wage requirements? The multi-billion-dollar University System controls pay rates, what raises are given, and how they are given – NOT the university presidents and definitely not the teams that negotiate with AFSCME. Providing workers the ability to earn a living wage and chase the American Dream doesn't just help them and their families: entire communities benefit, because those earned dollars go right back into the local economy and local community. And don't forget, it also means increased tax revenues to help fund schools, libraries, parks, roads and bridges.

In Higher Education we shouldn't have 15 different contracts within the USM family, we should have one contract with one set of mutually agreed upon rules.

We all know of the struggles and challenges in the HBCU schools of Maryland: the harm that is done by having so many contracts are seen in the HBCUs, which are separate and NOT equal within the USM system. One contract would help to unify all USM schools resulting in equal wages, policies and procedures. Consolidating bargaining so that wages, working conditions, and health and safety issues are negotiated across the state will have a positive effect on HBCUs, as the standards and expectations will be harmonized between all the schools in the University System.

We need your committee to support unionized workers so that we can bargain with the entity, the USM, that controls wages so we can get our brothers and sisters out of poverty and raise our families' standards of living.

I ask for a favorable report on House Bill 641. Thank you for your consideration.