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**SJ 1 – FIFA 2026 World Cup – Protection of Human Rights
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 14, 2020**

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SJ 1 – FIFA 2026 World Cup – Protection of Human Rights. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

The World Cup – the largest sporting event on Earth – is coming to the United States in 2026. Maryland has the opportunity to get not one, but two locations for games for the World Cup: The Baltimore Metro Area and the D.C. Metro Area. Both Baltimore and D.C. are among seventeen cities in the United States vying to win bids to host the games, of which twelve will be selected. If they are awarded games in the World Cup, Baltimore's M&T Bank Stadium and FedEx Field in Prince George's County would serve as the locations for events. Additionally, teams will need practice fields and facilities in the two surrounding areas, with Goucher College, Towson University, and fields as far out as Harford County slated to host in the Baltimore region, while University of Maryland, College Park would serve the teams in Prince George's.

With an estimated global television audience of 3.5 billion people, and millions of international travelers coming to attend games, the impact of the 2026 World Cup Games cannot be overstated. Each host city is expected to have \$300 million to \$500 million in economic activity. From Charles County and Southern Maryland, from Montgomery to Harford, hundreds of thousands of workers will be impacted, and thousands of Maryland small businesses will benefit from the Games.

But we need to get this right, and we have six years to plan properly for the Games. It is imperative that we ensure human rights and labor rights are protected, and that we value the dignity of every traveler, worker, attendee, and player; and our communities. SJ 1 affirms Maryland's commitment to human rights and sets the tone of how we should proceed in hosting the World Cup.

The Federation International de Football Association (FIFA) – the governing body of the World Cup Games – has had a very problematic past when it comes to supporting human rights in host countries and cities around the world. In the 2018 Russian games at least 21 workers died in stadium construction, North Korean forced laborers were used, and anti-LGBT laws in Russia were enforced¹. In the upcoming 2022 World Cup Games in Qatar, migrant workers brought in to facilitate the events have been exploited for their labor, with many being denied the right to leave by their employers. In 2017, FIFA worked with Qatar to sign an agreement with the UN International Labor Organisation (ILO) to enact legislative reforms that would protect migrant workers including: temporary minimum wage, introducing a law for domestic workers, setting up new dispute committees and establishing a workers’ support and insurance fund. Qatar has also ratified two important international human rights treaties².

With the 2026 World Cup Games in North America, FIFA has partnered with the ILO to ensure that human rights are embedded in the Games, going so far as to demand plans from host cities, on how they will protect human rights. Moreover, these plans must be included in a city’s bid to FIFA. For Baltimore and the D.C. Metro Area, the strength of their plans could be the deciding factor in selecting them as host cities. The State of Maryland can aid them in being selected – and show our commitment to protecting human rights – by passing SJ 1 and adding it to the bid packages of each city.

The final selection of the twelve American host cities will be announced this coming summer. It is in the interest of all Marylanders to get these games in Baltimore and the D.C. Metro Area, and we must ensure that human rights and labor rights are embedded at every level of planning and execution of the FIFA 2026 World Cup.

We urge a favorable report on SJ 1.

¹ Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/13/russias-bloody-world-cup>

² Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/02/reality-check-migrant-workers-rights-with-four-years-to-qatar-2022-world-cup/>