



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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HB 90 – State Personnel Management System – Office of the Public Defender – Placement and Collective Bargaining House Appropriations Committee January 18, 2022

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President**

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support HB 90 – State Personnel Management System – Office of the Public Defender – Placement and Collective Bargaining. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland’s 340,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

HB 90 brings fairness and equity to the Office of the Public Defender. First, it designates the positions of the Public Defender into appropriate employment categories in the State Personnel Management System. Second, it provides freedom for the employees to fully exercise their right to collective bargaining under the law.

HB 90 is an affirmation of our State’s values to encourage and empower workers to have a voice in discussing with employers their safety concerns, productivity, pay and benefits, and other working conditions. This is critically important with everything we have witnessed since March of 2020 and the COVID pandemic. Fundamentally, this is enabling legislation. It does not mandate a union. It does not force any worker to join or oppose a union.

The freedom to form and join a union is core to the U.N. Universal Declaration on Human Rights and is an “enabling” right—a fundamental right that ensures the ability to protect other rights.¹ HB 90 affords employees in the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) the same rights that 30,000 other Maryland State employees currently enjoy: The right to make their own

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

decision as to whether they want to organize and form a union. And, Maryland would join 18 other states where public defender employees have collective bargaining rights.

In an Executive Order early last year, President Biden reaffirmed the position of the United States on collective bargaining rights by stating “*It is also the policy of the United States to encourage union organizing and collective bargaining.*”² We believe that the State of Maryland should follow the lead of the United States and do the same

For freedom and equity, we ask for a favorable report on HB 90.

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/22/executive-order-protecting-the-federal-workforce/>