

**Written Testimony Submitted for the House Appropriations Committee
Testimony of Kelli Cover, member, AFSCME – Maryland Local 423
HB 90 – State Personnel – Office of the Public Defender – Placement and Collective
Bargaining
January 13, 2022**

SUPPORT

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice-Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Kelli Cover and I am an Assistant Public Defender for the Maryland Office of the Public Defender in Baltimore County. I'm writing in **support of HB 90**. Collective Bargaining is important to me because it would bring stability to our workforce and improve retention, which would lead to better representation of our clients.

In my three years with the agency, I have witnessed countless employees leave our office. In addition to those that left by choice due to the working conditions, many have also been the subject of a "midnight transfer." Within my first week of employment, my direct supervisor and another supervisor were demoted without warning, and our office manager was moved out of the district. Within my first year, our District Public Defender was transferred without notice.

As criminal defense attorneys, our clients deserve zealous representation. When we fear retaliation and know we have no protection or avenue for recourse, this impedes on our ability to effectively represent our clients.

Collective Bargaining would not only provide due process for employees, but it would allow us to advocate for more resources to better represent our clients and support our staff. This would lead to improved retention, as well as the ability to recruit and retain the best staff.

When an attorney leaves the office, cases must be absorbed by other attorneys and the client's representation is negatively impacted. I was recently assigned a case in which I am the client's 3rd attorney in less than a year. Not only would HB 90 improve continuity of representation by improving employee retention, but it would allow us to create a processes for issues like employee transfers and for our clients when changes do occur.

It is a privilege to do this work for our clients. We pour our heart and soul into this work and want to keep doing so, but with the rights and protections we desperately need. Protection for us will result in better protection for our clients.

I urge the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 90.

Kelli Cover
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