

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Senate Finance Committee
Darlene Preston, member, Maryland Defenders Union, AFSCME Local 423
SB 255 - State Personnel Management System - Office of the Public Defender – Placement and
Collective Bargaining
Sponsor: Senator Pam Beidle
Senate Finance Committee, Thursday, February 10, 2022**

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice-Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Darlene Preston and I am a proud employee of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender in Wicomico County. I am writing today to ask for your support in passing SB 255.

For the last 10 years I have dedicated my career to OPD and our clients. As an intake specialist, I help our clients navigate a system they hoped they would never find themselves in. I interview clients and gather the data we need to pass on to their attorney. Without intake specialists, the application process would be quite challenging.

Over the last decade I've also been forced to have two, sometimes even three jobs just to get by. Even now I pick up work where I can, and when I can't I'm having to make the difficult decisions on which bills to pay, and where to cut back. Without competitive salaries and a voice in our working conditions, we cannot retain quality staff, which places the burden of higher workloads on the rest of us. Without collective bargaining, the overworked staff cannot advocate for ourselves and our clients to make the improvements we need.

With collective bargaining OPD employees who spend their careers on the front lines of the agency would be able to bring their expertise and advice to the table with management and make sensible policy decisions that make the agency better. We would be able to address policy changes and adequate work distribution in an open and transparent ways that would leave us feeling less hopeless about a seemingly never-ending pile of cases.

The attorneys work hard in giving the best representation they can to the clients, and core staff is a huge part of that. Without the ability to speak up, negotiate with management, or forming a clear process for who issues at the agency are addressed, we will continue to lose quality staff and the clients will suffer.

I am asking for your support in voting YES to pass SB 255.

Thank you,

Darlene Preston
Intake Specialist
Wicomico County