

MARYLAND CATHOLIC LABOR NETWORK

Testimony Supporting SB255: State Personnel Management System – Office of the Public
Defender – Placement and Collective Bargaining
Senate Finance Committee
Thursday, February 10, 2022 at 1:00pm

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

The Maryland Catholic Labor Network writes in support of SB255, legislation that would guarantee employees of the Office of the Public Defender the right to organize and bargain collectively.

The Maryland Catholic Labor Network is an association of Catholic trade union activists and Catholic clergy, religious and lay social ministry leaders committed to Catholic Social Teaching on labor and work. And Catholic teaching on this subject is clear: all workers have the right to organize in unions.

The right of workers to organize in unions and bargain collectively has been a core element of Catholic Social Teaching since Pope Leo XIII issues his encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. This teaching has been reaffirmed many times since. As Pope Benedict XVI concluded in *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), “The repeated calls issued within the Church’s social doctrine, beginning with *Rerum Novarum*, for the promotion of workers’ associations that can defend their rights must therefore be honoured today even more than in the past (25).”

In the case of Maryland’s public defenders, there is additional reason for Catholics to support the right to organize. The employees of the Maryland OPD serve the poor of Maryland by working to ensure that every client is treated fairly under the law and in accord with their human dignity. The work is draining, even overwhelming, with caseloads often reaching unmanageable levels. With guaranteed access to grievance procedures and the right to collectively bargain, employees of the Maryland OPD would be in a much stronger position to ensure that their indigent clients receive outstanding representation and that they themselves are treated fairly in the process.

As a matter of justice for workers, and justice for criminal defendants, the Maryland Catholic Labor Network urges a favorable report on SB255. Thank you for your consideration.

Maryland Catholic Labor Network

Fr. Ty Hullinger (St. Anthony of Padua, St Dominic & Most Precious Blood Parishes, Baltimore)
Chuck Hendricks (Unite Here), *Steering Committee Representatives*

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