



NAACP

Maryland

STATE CONFERENCE

SB -255

**State Personnel and Pensions – Office of the Public Defender –
Collective Bargaining and Placement
Willie Flowers; President
NAACP-MSC**

**Appropriations Committee
Thursday, February 10, 2022
POSITION: Favorable**

The Maryland NAACP Statewide Conference is in support of Senate Bill -255. This legislation extends collective bargaining to state employees in the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) who are currently excluded. It would also provide merit protections to the attorneys in the OPD. We believe collective bargaining plays an important role in sustaining a robust and diverse middle class in Maryland. The secretaries, paralegals, social workers, and attorneys in the Office of the Public Defender deserve to have a voice in negotiating their wages, just as other state employees have.

Many of the clients served by the OPD are Black and Brown and they are subjected to a criminal justice system that has well documented biases. In recent years, the Maryland General Assembly has attempted to tackle these injustices by taking up justice reinvention, police reform and this year, cannabis legislation. As we look to make fundamental shifts in our criminal-legal system, we must look at our Public Defenders as a first line of defense against the injustices of this biased system. All Marylanders deserve zealous legal representation and due process, regardless of their race or income. The right to public defense is guaranteed in the constitution and we must engage in better policy decisions to make sure this defense is excellent. That includes providing adequate resources to the OPD to ensure manageable caseloads and enough staff to adequately prepare a client's defense. It also means retaining experienced staff. All of which, collective bargaining helps with.

We believe every worker in America should have the right to collectively bargain and we are proud to support the employees in the Office of the Public Defender who have been organizing for this right for the last two years. We urge the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 90. Let them have a voice.

