



**Testimony for the Senate Finance Committee
February 10, 2022**

**SB 255- State Personnel Management System - Office of the Public Defender -
Placement and Collective Bargaining**

FAVORABLE

The OPEIU LOCAL 2 Union Shop of the ACLU of Maryland supports SB 255 that would reclassify employees of the Public Defender and allow for the rights under collective bargaining. The ACLU of Maryland unit, comprised of organizers, attorneys, legal fellows and assistants, associates, and policy specialists, were recognized on July 31st 2019. Collective bargaining statutes provide critical and necessary protection for workers who exercise basic civil rights, in particular, the rights of speech, association, and petition. Efforts to strip workers of these protections have no place in our democracy.

It is important that OPD employees receive the same rights and protections 30,000 other Maryland state employees in executive branch agencies, enjoy through a collective bargaining agreement. The attorneys who work for OPD have also been excluded from the merit protections offered under the state personnel management system (SPMS) and are misclassified as “at-will” special appointees.

Public Defender employees can become stronger advocates to reverse the chronic underfunding and systemic injustices their clients have experienced with the power of collective bargaining and reclassification.

For the foregoing reasons, the OPEIU LOCAL 2 Union Shop of the ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on SB 255.