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Patrick Moran - President

HB 116 – Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery – Collective Bargaining POSITION: FAVORABLE

Collective Bargaining Rights are Fundamental

AFSCME Council 3 supports HB 116. The legislation enables collective bargaining rights for employees at the Walters Art Gallery. Article 23 of the Universal Human Rights Declaration adopted by the United Nations in 1948 affirms that collective bargaining rights are fundamental to human dignity. The security officers, maintenance workers, IT workers, curators, conservators, and marketing professionals who work at the Walters Art Gallery deserve to have dignity at work as well.

Why Legislation is Needed

While issues like pay disparities and a lack of promotional opportunities have been long-standing issues for the employees at the Walters Art Gallery, like many workers, the pandemic served as a catalyst to begin organizing for a union. Safety protocols were poorly communicated, and workers weren't given an opportunity to provide input. The final straw occurred when renovations were happening in the building that caused staff to be exposed to noxious gases that management did not protect workers from. Walters Workers United began organizing almost two years ago and in unprecedented fashion achieved overwhelming support from fellow employees in a short amount of time.

The Walters Art Gallery is a unique institution. It is owed by Baltimore City. It was created by an act of the General Assembly and by City ordinance in 1933 after Mr. Walters left his art gallery and property to the City. This makes them a public entity and public employer. City funds are used to help pay employee salaries and benefits and substantial oversight over the Walters Art Gallery is exercised by the Mayor and City Council. However, because of gaps in Maryland labor law, there is no process for these employees to gain union recognition and collective bargaining rights. Like legislation passed by the General Assembly in 1982 with the Baltimore Police Department, and then again in 2021 with the Baltimore County Public Library system, legislation must be passed to enable collective bargaining for these public workers and to create the framework to negotiate with the Walters Art Gallery.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 116. Thank you.

Every AFSCME Maryland State and University contract guarantees a right to union representation.
An employee has the right to a union representative if requested by the employee.
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