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MAJORITY WHIP

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Oral Testimony of Jazz Lewis
HB984: The Public Employee Relations Act
Before the Appropriations Committee

To Chair Barnes, Vice-Chair Change and members of the Appropriations Committee

I am proud to introduce House Bill 984 the Public Employee Relations Act (PERA), which will ensure that Maryland streamlines and modernizes our state's Labor Relations Boards. This will provide our state and its employees more timely and ultimately better resolution to workplace disputes and grievances. This bill and its provisions will not impact private employers or employees and will only impact employees who work in the executive branch, K-12 schools, or institutions of higher learning.

Maryland's current system for resolving disputes has been cobbled together over decades and is spread throughout the Education and State Personnel and Pensions Articles of the code. This has created an overly-complicated system where employee rights and procedures vary based on where the individual is employed. Additionally, the state's process to remedy disputes is separated into 3 different public labor relations boards: the State Labor Relations Board, the State Higher Education Relations Board, and the Public School Labor Relations Board. These boards are understaffed and underfunded and because they are separated are stretched thin. Resulting in delayed rulings, slow resolution and inconsistency across the boards.

PERA will address these issues by consolidating the 3 boards into a singular Public Employee Relations Board like that exists on the federal level. We also consolidate these matters within Maryland law. This single central board will be the sole contact to officiate disputes and provide timely resolution for employees and the state. This central board will also have updated and streamlined procedures that will allow for shorter timelines and quicker resolution. Benefiting both employees and employer who can see faster resolution to disputes. For example, under the current system when the issue of hazard pay arose during COVID, employees had to file individual grievances rather than their representative doing so for their whole bargaining units. This is an inefficient and time-intensive way to resolve these grievances.

PERA also includes measures to standardize the use of "card check" to bargaining units within Maryland's government to declare their intention to join a union. Some employees are permitted to use this process rather than going through an expensive election while others are denied the use of "card check." PERA also prohibits state funds from being spent on anti-union campaigns or activities.

The Public Employee Relations Act will ensure that Maryland, and its state employees have a modern and efficient organization to adjudicate disputes and resolve grievances fairly and timely.

For these reasons I urge a favorable report.