



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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HB 116 - Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery - Collective Bargaining House Appropriations Committee January 24, 2023

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President**

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Chairmen and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 116 - Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery - Collective Bargaining. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 340,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

HB 116 is an affirmation of our State's values to encourage and empower workers to have a voice in discussing with employers their safety concerns, productivity, pay and benefits, and other working conditions. In our shared mission to leave no one behind, we must make sure that we grant collective bargaining rights to all public workers, no matter how big or small the institution is.

Fundamentally, this is enabling legislation. It does not mandate a union. It does not force any worker to join or oppose a union. It simply allows workers to decide, for themselves, what their path forward will be. The freedom to form and join a union is core to the U.N. Universal Declaration on Human Rights and is an "enabling" right—a fundamental right that ensures the ability to protect other rights.

HB 116 affords workers at the Walters Art Gallery the right to make their own decision as to whether they want to organize and form a union. The same right to self-determination has already been realized by other cultural workers around the State. Last July, workers at the Baltimore Museum of Art voted overwhelmingly to unionize.

Efforts to form a union at Walters Art Gallery have been delayed by the museum's assertion that they were a private entity and not subject to information requests. This forced the union to sue. The court found in favor of the union and declared that Walters Art Gallery is a public institution. With this new reality firmly established, it becomes the responsibility of the General Assembly to make sure these workers can move forward with forming their union.

For freedom and equity, we ask for a favorable report on HB 116.