

Appropriations Committee
Hearing: Tuesday, January 24, 2023, 1pm

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to ask you to reject House Bill 116, “Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery - Collective Bargaining,” filed by Delegate Robbyn Lewis.

One of the great successes of the Walters Art Museum is that the Trustees—through diligent attention and successful fundraising—have succeeded in growing the museum’s endowment funds, which provide crucial annual operating support. As the Chair of the Board’s Investment Committee, I am especially familiar with the impact of this work, as well as its challenges.

So I am concerned that—and confused by—the vague language in the bill that Delegate Lewis has put forward, which redefines the Walters as “a unit and instrumentality of the state and the city.” I am confused because it does not address the intended implications of such broad language. At the same time, I am concerned because it could be misunderstood as an improper taking of private property (e.g., our endowment fund) without due process. I have no doubt that the Trustees would vigorously fight such an action, given that this is both private property and assets composed substantially of gifts made to the Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery, Inc., and not to the City and the State. **Put directly: No future donor will give to an institution that cannot commit to using their donated funds as intended—and HB 116 introduces just such uncertainty.**

HB 116 is not necessary to address the desire of some Walters employees to form a union; there are no impediments to them pursuing that process. But HB 116 goes so much further even than that single issue that it is of great concern—and should be rejected.

Michael J. Young, Trustee, The Walters Art Museum
Chair, Investment Committee