

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Appropriations Committee**

January 31, 2023

H.B. 65 Education - Public Libraries - Collective Bargaining

My name is Bethany Vangrin, and I am a resident of Harford County. For the past 16 years, I have proudly worked for the Harford County Public Library and currently hold the position of Children's Librarian at the Bel Air Branch. I'm writing to voice my support for House Bill 65 in favor of collective bargaining for the State of Maryland public libraries.

During my tenure with Harford County Public Library, I've had the pleasure to serve on statewide library book award committees, present at several Maryland Library Association annual conferences, and participate in numerous statewide trainings and meetings. Through these opportunities, I have met and witnessed the dedicated staff working to better their customer's experiences within public libraries across Maryland.

The public library is where the public goes for informational needs or their next book to read, but we also provide enrichment, education, and enjoyment for all ages. Day in and day out, library workers provide valuable services to all who visit a local library branch and beyond. In Harford County alone, a library visitor can apply for a US Passport, discover 3D printing with their child, explore their ancestors in our local history room, and check out a ukulele, all without leaving the walls of the Bel Air Library. Throughout a visit to a library branch, the public will encounter a library employee who will use their experience and expertise to make the customer's visit successful. However, the lack of legislation prevents the same library employee, who used their training and education to assist the library visitor, from exercising their Constitutional right to form a union and collectively bargain without a lengthy legislative process.

The time is right for the passage of HB65. As workers in the public sector, many library employees struggle to have their voices heard by their administration. We encounter more and more pressure to accomplish work duties with less support due to the elimination of positions and resources. For instance, in the Harford County system alone, our library system has eliminated the Children's and Teen Coordinator, the Volunteer Coordinator, and Programming Specialist within the past five years. The loss of these positions has added stress on employees as tasks from the vacant positions are reallocated to lower-level positions without compensation or reevaluation of job descriptions. For instance, in 2019, I was asked to fill in as the Acting Chairperson of the system's Early Literacy Team due to the Children's and Teen Coordinator vacancy. It's 2023, and I still serve as the team's "acting" chairperson with no end date in sight. Although I am dedicated to leading this team, it does unfairly add responsibilities and duties to my workload. It may be too late to reinstate the eliminated positions. However, the passing of this collective bargaining legislation allows public library employees to have a voice in future decisions impacting their workload.

A union is the best pathway to allowing employees' voices to be heard. I am asking for a favorable report on HB65 to ensure the right to unionize and collectively bargain for public library employees across the State of Maryland.

Thank you for your time.

Bethany Vangrin