



SB 284 – Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery – Collective Bargaining

Position: Support

My name is Will Hays and I am an Associate Registrar in the department of Conservation, Collections, and Technical Research at the Walters Art Museum and have worked for the Walters for over 10 years. I live in Baltimore City in district 40 and am a proud member of Walters Workers United. I strongly support collective bargaining rights because working conditions at the museum are unfair and unjust. There is no accountability for leadership and no real inclusion of the voices of the workers who make the museum possible as a service to the public. Collective bargaining would guarantee that our underpaid and overworked staff have a say in determining the conditions of our employment. It would also increase transparency in the museum's decision-making process, which has a direct effect on workers' wellbeing and safety.

I wish to call your attention to portions of the written testimony that was submitted by Walters' trustees at the first House committee hearing on January 24 regarding this legislation on the House side. Some of the testimonies characterized HB116 as a government takeover of private property. I am no legal scholar, but I strongly believe this is false and misleading. The bill enshrines workers' right to collectively bargain. It does not take anything away from the Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery (which is their legal name). Because of the unique nature of our institution - a corporation created by the state of Maryland to care for property bequeathed to the City of Baltimore "for the benefit of the public" - there is no clear legal route to collective bargaining or regulation to establish it. HB116 and SB284 would establish what is lacking in the law.

I also want to address a specific piece of written testimony from Peter Bain, the president-elect of the Walters Board of Trustees. I quote directly from Mr. Bain's written testimony:

"Yet I am not clear on how Delegate Lewis envisions the Trustees continuing to operate the Walters were it to be redefined as "a unit and instrumentality of the state and the city." Will the City be reimbursing the Trustees for the cost of repairs made to the museum's City owned buildings—but which have been paid for by the Trustees? Should we be planning to relocate the 30% of the collection that is owned by the Trustees and not by the City?" [emphasis mine] And so on.

The US Internal Revenue Service, the US Department of Education, and the Baltimore City Circuit Court have already defined the Walters as a "unit and instrumentality of the state and the city". There is no "redefining" by this bill. It pertains to our right as workers to collectively bargain.

As a citizen of Baltimore City and the State of Maryland, I'm offended that a Walters board member would threaten that, should HB116 pass, the Trustees will "reclaim" part of the museum's collection of art - the equivalent of "I'll take my ball and go home," and in itself a taking of public property. Mr. Bain seems to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of his role as a trustee, which is not legal ownership over the Walters, which is actually owned by the public, but as one who is *entrusted* to operate the museum as a fiduciary to the public. It entails no ownership, only stewardship. If the legislative body that created the Walters formalizes the right for workers to collectively bargain, the incoming president of the Board of Trustees says they might move the portion of the art collection that came after the bequest of Henry Walters to another place? Where, how, and why? The Trustees were formed "for the benefit of the public" and this museum's mission is to serve our communities - the city, the state, the nation, and the world. A statement like this is not "for the benefit of the public" and does no public service at all. Even if it is a hollow threat, it shows that the desire of the museum's leadership to avoid accountability, equity, and inclusion overcomes their responsibilities to the people of Baltimore and their fiduciary role. I call this out specifically to give context to our pressing need for this bill and why we need legislation to protect the workers of this public institution that serves so many communities.

Thank you so much for holding a hearing on SB284 in the Senate Finance Committee and I urge your support.