



Maryland Classified Employees Association

SUPERVISORS UNITED FOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee**

SB 298

State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Supervisory and Managerial Employees

February 26, 2023

SUPPORT

Good afternoon, Chair Griffith and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Erin Volz and I am a Child Welfare Investigations Supervisor in the Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services. I have been with the Department for over seven years, and a supervisor for nearly two years. I am a member of Supervisors United for Collective Bargaining and the Maryland Classified Employees Association, AFT local 1935. As a state supervisor, currently excluded from the state's collective bargaining law for Maryland employees, I am here today to advocate for SB 298, and ask this committee for a favorable report.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) provides many essential entitlements to your constituents. These entitlements enable Maryland families to ensure that their needs, and the needs of their children, are met. I am a licensed clinical social worker and I have been employed with DSS since I completed graduate school and earned my MSW. Although the opportunities are plentiful for licensed social workers, I decided to dedicate my career to State service in child welfare. At the time I began my employment, it was well known that the private sector offered a substantially higher salary; however, I felt that my services would be better utilized in the child welfare system. I chose to enter the field of social work that prioritizes child safety in their homes. After five years of service to the State as a Child Welfare Investigator, I earned my LCSW-C (the highest social work licensure in the state of Maryland) and became a Child Welfare Investigations Supervisor. There is nowhere else I'd want to practice social work, although, at times, the challenges we face are greater than my love for this profession.

Although many believe that the purpose of DSS is to provide families access to benefits, including food stamps, cash assistance, daycare vouchers, housing, and assisting with navigating the healthcare system, the field in which I am employed, Child Protective Services (CPS), is not an entitlement. Child Protective Services is a necessary failsafe to ensure that regardless of a person's financial ability to provide care to their children, their children remain safe, whether that is in the home or in foster care. One could argue that CPS is equally as necessary to the functioning of our society as other services held in much higher regard: law enforcement, first responders, teachers, doctors, and nurses. Although CPS is often forgotten when recognition is given, the necessity of our services is critical, and we are essential. The COVID-19 pandemic was as dangerous to our health and safety as it was to those mentioned above. Governor Hogan's order to stay at home did not apply to those of us in child welfare. State buildings were closed, so we had to perform our essential duties without anywhere to practice. We are required to enter the homes of strangers, interview everyone in the home



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privately, and assess for child safety. We were also not provided with any PPE from the State, nor were we initially entitled to additional pay. We placed ourselves at an eminent risk of contracting COVID-19, daily, to ensure that the needs of the children of Maryland were met.

Supervisors had the burden, both financially and physically, to locate PPE for our staff and pay for it out of our own pockets. It was, and still is, our responsibility to ensure that staff are safe in the field. Just because our voices were not heard does not mean that we abandoned our responsibilities to our staff. We used our own home internet, printers, ink, paper, and every other office supply imaginable for nearly two years without compensation. There was no way for us to advocate for ourselves or our staff without a bargaining unit specifically focused on the additional issues of the supervisory position; those that often go unseen to our staff. In the early days of the pandemic, when hand sanitizer and face masks were nowhere to be found, we worked tirelessly to ensure that our staff had these items. Some sewed homemade masks, others reached out to community members who were sewing them and providing them to first responders. All of the supervisors in CPS are social workers, finding resources for people is essentially what we are educated to do. Not only did we have to continue to perform our regular duties as supervisors: managing staff, monitoring caseloads, participating with safety and permanency planning for children, participating in interagency meetings, providing supervision, meeting mandates, closing cases, addressing client concerns, testifying in court (the list is unimaginably exhaustive), but we also had the additional responsibility of searching for PPE for our staff to ensure their physical safety. If there had been collective bargaining, perhaps Maryland supervisors would have been able to provide our staff with these essential items, or at least obtain fair compensation for them.

Outside of the COVID-19 pandemic, as supervisors, it is our responsibility to advocate on behalf of our staff and ensure that they are afforded countless protections through their own collective bargaining units. Our staff's collective bargaining units have been able to secure equitable pay raises, job security, and affordable employee health benefits for our staff. As a supervisor, I applaud the efforts made by my staff's collective bargaining unit and celebrate the compensation my staff have received.

Although I am sincerely happy for my staff, I also feel as though supervisors were not equally compensated for our efforts. There was an unintended consequence of the collective bargaining efforts that were accomplished. After a raise in compensation for our staff, many of my peers are now earning a salary that is LESS than what their staff are earning. This creates a very difficult position for those currently in supervisory positions; if they were to resign as a supervisor and pursue a "demotion" to a non-supervisory position, they would be paid at a higher rate than what they are currently receiving. Additionally, as supervisory positions often come with more responsibility than non-supervisory positions, this could become an appealing option for those supervisors with lower pay rates. Without experienced and knowledgeable supervisors, we cannot



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continue to grow and develop the skills of our State staff. We need our experienced supervisors to continue to lead in supervisory positions, removing the temptation of pursuing a demotion for a pay increase would help to ensure our supervisors continue to lead.

I firmly believe that the only way to achieve this is by the creation of a collective bargaining unit specifically for supervisory staff. Supervisors shouldn't have to choose between advocating for their staff to receive the benefits afforded by a collective bargaining unit and being paid at a lower rate than their staff themselves. Supervisors shouldn't have to voluntarily take a demotion to earn a salary that is comparable to their staff. Please, advocate for supervisors this legislative session, in the same way we advocate for our staff.

To conclude, when state collective bargaining law was introduced and passed over 20 years ago, we as supervisors were erroneously excluded, even though we are state workers and do not hire, fire, promote, or adjust grievances for any state employee. We again call this committee to issue a favorable report for SB 298. Thank you.