

Maryland General Assembly Senate Finance Committee

Hearing: Thursday, February 16, 2023, 1:00 p.m.

Dear Madam Chair Griffith and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you in my role as a Trustee of the Walters Art Museum and the Chair of the Board's DEAI Committee, to encourage you not to advance Senate Bill 284, "Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery - Collective Bargaining," filed by Senator Jill P. Carter. In my opinion, this bill risks depriving the museum's employees of their right to vote on an important labor issue—and may jeopardize both the museum and the jobs of the employees that Senator Carter seeks to support.

By framing the opportunity for unit certification as a matter of counting authorization cards, SB 284 is a **dramatic, anti-democratic step backwards for the rights of our employees**. Under most scenarios—whether through a petition submitted to the relevant agency or through a third-party election agreement negotiated between the parties—the museum's employees would be assured of their legal right to vote on forming a union. Even the museum's employees, on their organizing website (<https://www.waltersworkersunited.org/frequently-asked-questions>), reference the importance of a vote on this matter. However, because authorization cards may have been signed in any number of circumstances, a count of these cards is not the same thing as a vote. The approach taken by SB 284 would deprive a group of people employed by an organization in the State of Maryland of their own right to vote on an issue essential to their livelihood—and effectively silences the voices of employees who may at one time or another have signed an authorization card solely to learn more about the benefits of a union, not as a replacement for voting for one.

Of more importance is the **vague meaning and scope of SB 284's declaration that the museum is to be considered "a unit and instrumentality of the state and the city."** The museum is governed by a self-perpetuating board. I do not believe it is Senator Carter's place to decide, via legislation, that the role or existence of the Trustees should be changed without input or consultation from those same Trustees. Furthermore, the implications of the changes being proposed are fatally unclear. The impact of this vague language could be enormous and consequential on everything from the Walters Art Museum's finances and philanthropic model, to its facilities and operations, to its liabilities in relation to visitors.

SB 284 should not be advanced. We do not wish to inflict damage on this treasured cultural asset of the State of Maryland and the City of Baltimore—but that will be the effect of this unfortunate piece of legislation.

Sheila Mosmiller Vidmar
Trustee, The Walters Art Museum