



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

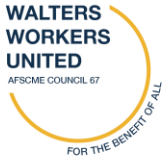
Position: Support

My name is Angie Elliott, and I am a member of Walters Workers United. I am Head of Objects Conservation at the Walters Art Museum and have worked there for close to 10 years. I'm excited to ask for your support on SB284.

Growing up, I was surrounded by family and community who were union members. I know that the reason we had such a stable environment as a working class family was because my dad was a unionized steelworker. The benefits and pay directly associated with their union contracts supported our family and supported me as a first generation college student. I'm so proud of the work my family does and want that same respect and voice for those of us who have chosen to work at the Walters.

Until recently, in the museum industry, there's a lack of transparency around many aspects of our work and compensation. Though I was thrilled by the museum's recent decision to raise pay across all levels of staff, I feel strongly that this was at least in part a result of our organizing efforts as a union. I also know that these increases aren't protected by a contract. I support forming a union so we can bring more transparency to our day to day lives. It was encouraging to see the recent lawsuit decision that the Walters is considered an instrumentality of government and is subject to public information requests.

I hope that you will support SB284 so that employees at the Walters Art Museum can gain collective bargaining rights. We are passionate about what we do and excited to move forward.



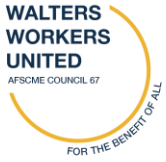
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Position: Support

My name is Anna Clarkson and I am a member of Walters Workers United. I'm the librarian/archivist at the museum. I'm writing to ask that you support Senate Bill 284. I've worked at the Walters Art Museum for almost five years, and I am so proud to work at the museum, a world-class institution that provides valuable artistic, historic, and cultural resources to the City of Baltimore and beyond. A world-class institution should treat its employees in a way that reflects that same standard of excellence and care.

The Walters Art Museum workers need a contract and a protected voice at work. Collective bargaining is about our most basic rights as workers and our ability to negotiate over the conditions of our work. We need basic bargaining rights at the Walters so that we can ensure that the people who work here are treated fairly and equitably. Through collective bargaining we will work to strengthen the institution and further its mission. Expanding our rights is good for workers, the museum, the public, the City, and the State.

I am asking you to vote to support SB284 both in this committee and in the Senate. This legislation would close an oversight in Maryland collective bargaining law and ensure that all of us working here at the Walters who serve the people of Baltimore and visitors from across the state of Maryland can enjoy our basic bargaining rights at work.



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Position: Support

My name is Garrett Stralnic. I'm a Gallery Officer at the Walters Art Museum. In my three years at the Walters, I have seen avenues for us to express ourselves shutdown by management.

I have seen management turn off the chat function in zoom meetings for all staff meetings. In some meetings management has told us we can only ask questions if they are submitted in advance and approved. We have even lost the ability to send all-staff email when it was used by staff in different departments to express concerns about the loss of frontline staff's "appreciation pay" (hazard pay) during a height of the pandemic. This all-staff exchange via email was also followed by intimidating HR meetings with the director for most of the security staff who engaged in it.

When it comes to our pay, we are not brought into the room for any real conversations. In October 2021, they disbanded our DEAI joint working group in response to our unionizing. Museum leadership recently increased staff pay to \$18 an hour for security staff, as part of an effort to live into the Museum's values around DEAI. While this increase in pay is appreciated, it doesn't reflect our years of commitment to the Walters.

Our voices were initially lost when it came to our health and safety. As individuals, we raised concerns about vapors resulting from planned roof work at the Walters from the day it began and for weeks as multiple employees (myself included) had to leave work due to side effects. In fact, one of my coworkers went home with side effects on two separate days. It wasn't until a few weeks into roof work that we sent a letter signed by over half of the staff demanding effective safety precautions be taken to protect us. I do not believe we would have seen certain recent pay increases without our collective actions and it is quite clear that my coworkers would have had to continue working in a space that could make them physically ill without collective action. We have seen the Walters change some of their practices around our health and safety. Those practices can be directly attributed to us organizing and standing together to protect each other and the public. Having a health and safety committee through a union contract would be a tangible step in making our workplace safer.

This is why collective bargaining is crucial for the amazing and hardworking staff at the Walters. Please support SB284 in the Senate Finance Committee.



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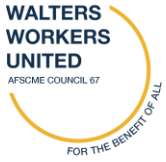
Position: Support

My name is Gregory Bailey, I'm a Senior Object Conservator at the Walters Art Museum. I'm also on the organizing committee for Walters Workers United, AFSCME. The Walters is one of the great treasures of Baltimore, not only because of its extraordinary collection of artworks, but because of the dedicated, talented staff who care for these collections and help to tell their stories. We deserve collective bargaining rights and urge the General Assembly to correct this oversight so that we can move forward and have our union recognized. I'm asking that you support SB284.

The Walters has recently committed itself to a set of public goals to increase diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. Many workers contributed to the development of these goals and are already working hard to achieve them. The final section of these goals, Build and Support a Dynamic Team, includes many items that are best addressed through collective bargaining and cooperation within a union structure. These include building "a team culture that is based on clarity, inclusivity, and accountability," "a new compensation strategy that is understood by staff and promotes pay equity," "professional development, leadership development, and mentorship programs," efforts to "diversify the staff and support diverse staff and perspectives," as well as "promote new ladders of opportunity in all areas of the museum." The most direct, inclusive, and transparent way to achieve these vital goals is through a single union representing all workers from across all departments in the museum so that we may work together to identify priorities for collective bargaining through a representative, democratic process.

We believe in the Walters Art Museum and support the incredible work of all our coworkers. Forming a wall-to-wall union will enable us to work together in the most efficient manner to achieve the museum's goals and support its mission to be a transformative force in the greater Baltimore area. Not only will this improve the Walters as an institution, but it will have enduring benefits for our families and our communities across Baltimore. Enabling collective bargaining rights for employees of the Walters Art Museum sends a strong message that Maryland supports the arts, supports its workers, and stands ready to move into a more equitable and inclusive future.

We ask that you support SB284 in the Senate Finance Committee.



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Position: Support

My name is Lex Reehill and I work in the Security department as a Monitor Room Officer. My colleagues and I manage alarm and fire systems, museum access, and emergency response. I have worked at the Walters Art Museum for over six years. I'm writing today to ask that you vote to support Senate Bill 284.

A wall-to-wall union is crucial for the betterment of the employees at the Walters. As Security officers, it is our duty to protect the people and the artwork of the institution, but we do not get the same consideration. Security is often treated like an afterthought by museum management.

Earlier this year, the Walters announced a pay floor increase for staff to \$17/hour. This information was welcomed, but something was missing. The pay floor increase did not include an equitable increase for existing staff. After six years of working at the Walters, I make the same amount as someone who is hired in my department today. My specialized knowledge as a long-time employee and Monitor Room officer, who is cross trained to work in gallery spaces, is not reflected in my pay. It feels as though my dedication to the museum is not valued, despite being an essential worker required to work through blizzards and pandemics. My colleagues and I deserve equitable pay that is informed by our experience, and the additional duties we must perform.

Unionization will help us, as well as our colleagues in other departments, to get accountability and clarity for how the museum decides to move forward post-pandemic. Over time, I have seen many, many passionate and hard-working people leave due to dissatisfaction, mistreatment, and pay inequity. A union will give us our voice back. It will help advocate for those who have been consistently put aside. Our experience has value. A union will create the best Walters Art Museum.

During the COVID-19 shutdown, essential staff saw a consistent mishandling of safety procedures, sluggish response to acquiring PPE, and an absence of manager/director-level support when it was needed most. It was scary to come in every day and not know what you were bringing home to your loved ones. It was scary having a leadership team that seemed unconcerned with our well-being. I don't ever want us to go through that again.

The Walters went weeks without communicating to all-staff about the risks associated with vapors even when multiple employees went home due to side effects. It took a large number of us coming together to send a letter for management before management took action, which makes me feel that my safety and my co-workers' safety is not a priority. This is exactly why we need a union at The Walters now. We need to be able to advocate and protect ourselves since it's clear they won't. Having a health and safety committee that we could negotiate in a union contract would be invaluable.

Thank you for supporting SB284 which would give us collective bargaining rights at the Walters Art Museum.



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Position: Support

My name is Merle Davison, and I am a proud member of Walters Worker United. I ask you to support Senate Bill 284. I have worked at the Walters Art Museum for 3 years as a Gallery Officer.

Having the support of representation as a whole is incredibly important. During the earlier stages of COVID-19, after the museum decided to re-open, without frontline staff input regarding any part of that decision, it was also declared to us on the frontline that our “hazard-pay” would be discontinued. We expressed our disagreement with that decision and asked for clarification and transparency as to why it had been made. Clarity regarding the finances of the museum was not available to us until after that decision went into effect.

During the time leading up to the cessation of hazard-pay, upper-management also made the decision to call “hazard-pay” “appreciation-pay” instead. We, in security, also voiced a strong opposition to that term, citing the gaslighting nature of management trying to change the perception of why we were being paid more during that time, as well as trying to decrease the focus on the actual hazard we were facing each day.

The museum email system was first used by me and then others, to voice concerns to decisions being made by museum management. At this point we were prohibited from sending emails to entire departments outside of security citing in the “Electronic Mail Policy,” that email “should not detrimentally impact employee productivity” and, apparently, upper management deemed our professional communications regarding our concerns about pay, our health and safety, and transparency from management as detrimental, even though the response from individuals in other departments was overwhelmingly supportive. Even now, a couple years later, strict parameters remain regarding communicating any concerns on a department-wide basis using our work email; multiple recipient emails are only allowed within our own department.

It’s worth noting that the museum has time and time again treated Gallery Officers and Monitor Room Officers differently than any other staff. You should know, we are consistently the most vulnerable staff at the museum. We are often treated as disposable and invisible. I should also mention that I am a Black woman. Most Walters staff are white. However, many of the front of house staff (security, retail, and maintenance) are people of color.

Having a union would significantly decrease management’s ability to intimidate and gaslight staff. Unionizing would support us all in obtaining, not only the pay equity we warrant, but the respect we deserve. This is why I’m asking that you support SB284. Having collective bargaining at the Walters will only make our institution a better place for everyone, one where we are not intimidated for speaking up.



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Position: Support

My name is Will Murray, and I am a proud member of Walters Workers United. I ask you to support Senate Bill 284. I've worked at the Walters Art Museum for 25 years in the maintenance department. I started as a maintenance technician in 1998 and was promoted to lead maintenance technician in 2003. I have built friendships and relationships, not just with my colleagues, but with artists, community members and frequent visitors. My co-workers refer to me as the "Mayor" at the Walters. I feel so valued by them. I have watched my friends and coworkers face reorganization after reorganization across many departments in the museum, as well as the complete dismantling of the education department. Looking into our workplace, you wouldn't guess that our two departments interact. But in reality, our work relies on one another. I was looking at a couple of pictures I have from 5 years ago, everyone except for me and my other colleague in my department is gone from those photos- many of whom were terminated after working at the Walters for years.

The turnover at the Walters has meant there are fewer of us here to train and onboard new staff when the museum does have new hires. The recent raise to our pay is nice, but it happened solely at the museum's discretion- we have no way of knowing if we'll continue to receive regular raises or promotions and if the museum will continue to respond to our demands for better pay.

I love the Walters, but that doesn't mean things shouldn't be better, it doesn't make any of us less committed to the organization or our work. It means we care enough to say the hard things. It's time for someone to listen. These and other factors contribute to our desperate need for a union to bring about more favorable conditions going forward. I'm urging you to support SB284. Having collective bargaining at the Walters will help us recruit and retain good staff. It will also serve as a way we can have a strong voice in our workplace.



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Position: Support

My name is Jordan Robinson. I am a proud member of Walters Workers United and I've worked at the Walters for three and a half years.

I am a part-time Gallery Officer, a member of the frontline staff that helps ensure guests in our museum have a safe and enriching experience while keeping the art secure.

We knew we needed to take action in 2020 when the height of the pandemic highlighted systemic issues. Combined with the summer protests around Black Lives Matter, key concerns were raised for us at the museum around equity, fairness, and inclusivity.

As a part-time, front-line employee, I see firsthand how the museum picks and chooses how it treats its workers. Back then, I had no paid time off, no holiday pay, no health insurance, and no retirement benefits. I remember when, with no input from us, leadership decided it was time for us to come back to work. I was scared. I was going back to work for 12 dollars an hour- less than my full time counterparts. At the same time, leadership cut off appreciation pay and other supportive programs.

Prior to organizing our union, we had no way to communicate about our treatment at work to fellow employees in different areas of the museum. When we had concerns about returning to work, we sent emails to our fellow staff members. We were then brought into meetings with leadership and HR to be reprimanded and intimidated.

Since then, we have fought hard to ensure that we are communicating between departments and across the museum. We've found power in advocating together collectively as a union.

Whether it's gaining paid-time off for part time officers or sending a signed petition asking leadership to take action when there were toxic vapors making us sick, only through collective action have we been able to win some improvements to our working conditions. Even still though, I do not receive health insurance or retirement benefits as a part-time employee. Imagine what can happen once we have a collective bargaining agreement.

I am urging you to stand with me and my colleagues and support our collective bargaining rights by supporting SB284. Thank you so much for your consideration.