

Maryland General Assembly Senate Finance Committee

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

Dear Madam Chair Griffith and Members of the Committee:

As Trustee and long-time supporter of the Walters Art Museum, I am writing to ask you to reject Senate Bill 284, "Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery - Collective Bargaining," filed by Senator Jill P. Carter.

One of the Walters Art Museum's points of great success has been its partnership—as a privately run institution—with governmental entities in the City of Baltimore and the State of Maryland. This partnership model means that while about 20 - 25% of our annual funding comes from government sources, we raise the other 75 - 80% from private sources.

This partnership model also means that while the City of Baltimore is the legal owner of three of the museum's five buildings and two-thirds of the collection—our privately raised funds are used to cover the capital expenses of maintaining and improving these buildings (along with the two buildings owned by the Trustees) and storing and conserving the collections (including the other third of the collection owned by the Trustees).

The Trustees are a private entity, but this partnership model ultimately benefits the institution, our visitors, the community, and the City—without adding further or significantly to the City's budget. And the ability to attract a diverse array of private support is predicated on the distinction between the City's ownership of some of the museum's assets and the Trustees' private ownership over other assets and their governance of the entire institution.

This bill will create unnecessary conflict between the museum and the City and the State. Moreover, this will have ripple effects well beyond the Walters by sending a negative message about Maryland as a place in which people should seek to do business and in which public-private partnerships like ours can thrive. Nonprofit organizations are important service providers, employers, and catalysts for change and innovation in their community—but they won't see Maryland as a hospitable environment if the threat of legislative intervention always looms. Surely this is not the message Senator Carter and the Finance Committee intend to convey.

Ellen Bernard
Trustee, Walters Art Museum