

BILL NO: House Bill 802
TITLE: Labor and Employment – Mandatory Meeting on Religious or Political Matters – Employee Attendance and Participation
COMMITTEE: Economic Matters
HEARING DATE: February 26, 2024
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

Political and religious coercion in the workplace is a growing problem that impacts workers from all backgrounds and industries. HB 802 seeks to protect workers from being forced to attend meetings at which religious or political views are discussed by prohibiting retaliation against workers who choose not to attend this type of meeting.

Maryland employers currently have the power to require workers to attend “captive audience” meetings, forcing workers to listen to the employer’s religious and political views while at work, and to take actions against those workers who choose not to attend these compulsory meetings. Because Maryland is an employment-at-will state, in the absence of a collective bargaining agreement that might provide more protection, this retaliation can include termination of the workers’ employment.

HB 802 was specifically tailored to protect Maryland workers from retaliation while also recognizing the importance of employer freedoms. HB 802 does not infringe on the rights of Maryland employers to conduct meetings regarding religious or political views, if these meetings are voluntary. HB 802 also specifically excludes religious corporations, organizations or associations, or educational institutions or private clubs that are currently exempt from the requirements of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Women remain under-represented in management positions and thus more likely to be in the group of workers who feel compelled to attend these meetings or face retaliation including termination, which would impact their ability to support themselves and their families. This bill will support women and their families in Maryland and as such, the Women’s Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges a favorable report on House Bill 802.

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.