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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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HB339: Unemployment Insurance – Disqualification – Stoppage of Work Caused by Labor Dispute

House Economic Matters Committee
Wednesday, February 14th, 2024 1:00PM

Under current law, an individual is disqualified from receiving unemployment benefits if they are unemployed as a result of a stoppage of work because of a labor dispute. HB339 would establish that this disqualification would not apply after 14 days of the stoppage.

Workers who are striking as part of a collective bargaining would prefer to be at work, not claiming unemployment benefits. When working conditions are unacceptable and compensation contracts are unfair, workers should have the right to fairly collectively bargain. Strikes are a tactic of last resort, but a necessary right to level the playing field for workers. During a strike, corporate executives continue making an income – while workers do not, compromising their ability to reach a fair deal. It is important that workers in a labor dispute can continue to afford their rent, groceries, and other basic necessities.

By removing the disqualification after 14 days, workers forgo two weeks of wages, then individuals otherwise eligible to receive unemployment benefits can receive them thereafter. Given that unemployment benefits cover the bare minimum of one's needs and cannot alone provide significant quality of life, allowing workers to claim unemployment after two weeks would not disincentivize reaching a satisfactory agreement in a timely manner. But, with this legislation, striking workers would not have to choose between long-term fair pay and working conditions and their short-term ability to support themselves and their families.

Disqualifying striking workers from receiving unemployment benefits strains the wellbeing of striking workers and their families, thus undermining collective bargaining rights.

It is for this reason, I urge the committee to give a favorable report on HB339.