

**Testimony in Support of HB 802 Labor and Employment – Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters – Employee Attendance and Participation**

Terry Cavanagh on behalf of SEIU Local 500

*Presented to the House Economic Matters Committee*

Favorable

February 28, 2024

SEIU Local 500 strongly supports HB 802 Protecting Workers from Captive Audience Meetings.

As a union of over 20,000 workers who serve Marylanders many of our members have been subject to captive audience meetings. HB 802 gives us the opportunity to end these practices that force workers to listen to religious and/ or political opinions that are contrary to their beliefs.

We wish to thank Delegate Vogel for sponsoring this legislation as well as co-sponsors Charkoudian and Stewart.

Why should workers need to tolerate being held captive and being forced to listen to their boss and his or her opinions about religious or political matters?

The answer to that question has been, 'because they are getting paid',

That answer reflects the historic attitude of employer – worker relationships as one of master and servant.

As our workplaces have become more ethnically, culturally, and religiously more diverse, we have the opportunity to look anew at this relationship and ask, 'Should workers have the freedom to refrain from attending these meetings?'

We are also witnessing a growing shrillness in our political discourse.

We believe it would be a benefit to all in eliminating mandatory attendance at these opinion-based, nonwork-related meetings. We believe it's better for workers to be entrusted to pursue the answers to their political and religious questions on their own time and in the matter of their choosing. They are more than capable of making these decisions on their own.

**We ask a FAVORABLE report on HB 802.**

Thank you.