



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**SB 591 - Education - Public Libraries - Collective Bargaining
(Library Workers Empowerment Act)
Senate Finance Committee
February 29, 2024**

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 591. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 provided millions of workers with the right to form unions and collectively bargain with their employers. It established the official policy of the United States was to promote collective bargaining through worker organizing. This was re-established by President Joe Biden, who issued Executive Order 14025, which stated, "the policy of the United States is to encourage worker organizing and collective bargaining and to promote equality of bargaining power between employers and employees." Unfortunately, millions of workers were left out from the National Labor Relations Act, leaving them without a legal process for their human right to form a union. These excluded workers include thousands of public sector library workers across the state of Maryland.

SB 591 is enabling legislation granting collective bargaining rights to public library workers across the state. It establishes an equitable process for workers to democratically select exclusive representatives that can bargain with employers over terms and conditions of employment. SB 591 does not require library workers to join a union, but creates a fair process with neutral arbiters, to certify representatives if the workers choose to unionize.

Past bills granting public library workers the right to organize focused on single counties or library systems, but this disjointed approach is time consuming and treats workers' essential rights like something they need to beg for from the state of Maryland before they can exercise it. SB 591 makes it clear that the State of Maryland values the rights of public library workers to exercise their freedom. It also seeks to conform union certification processes for library workers with the recently passed Public Employees Relations Act of 2023.

Collective bargaining is an important tool for workers in the fight for equity, social justice, and inclusion. Library workers are overwhelmingly women. The AFL-CIO's Department of Professional Employees (DPE) analyzed 2020 Census Bureau data and found that over 83% of librarians were women. Even within the profession women have been discriminated against in terms of pay and benefits, with women earning only 81.5% of what men in the same positions made. Union contracts are an essential part of the fight against the gender pay gap, helping to ensure that workers receive equal pay for equal work.

Maryland library workers have shown tremendous interest in organizing unions. Workers at Baltimore County Public Libraries voted to approve their first collective bargaining agreement in May 2022. In November 2022, workers at the Enoch Pratt Library System in Baltimore City voted 218-12 in favor of forming a union.

This bill sends a strong message to public library workers that their rights are respected and they have the freedom, supported by their state, to join together in a union and negotiate with their employers if they so choose.

We strongly encourage legislators to support SB 591.