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Senator Pamela Beidle
Finance Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 East
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 29, 2024

RE: Senate Bill 0591 Education – Public Libraries – Collective Bargaining

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier and Members of the Committee,

Maryland has for decades been considered Library Heaven. We are very proud of our well-used and well-respected libraries. Maryland library employees are some of the best in the country. With very few exceptions, each and every person who works in a library, from the director to the custodial staff, is there because they want to serve their community and provide access to the world of ideas, to safe, welcoming spaces and to connection with their community. I fully support the ability of library workers to collectively bargain and this discussion cannot and should not be about separating library workers from administrators from boards of trustees. First and foremost, we are working together as a team to serve our residents.

As you consider **Senate Bill 591 Education – Public Libraries – Collective Bargaining (Library Workers Empowerment Act)**, I respectfully request that you consider several amendments in addition to the ones that have already been accepted by the bill sponsors.

Howard County and Enoch Pratt Free Library are already underway with collective bargaining processes and have legislation that enables that process. Their employees, administration and Board of Library Trustees have been working in good faith with one another according to that existing legislation. *Both systems should be exempt from this bill under the same conditions as Prince George's, Montgomery and Baltimore County* (page 4 lines 3-5).

Sec. 23-907(A)(2)(IV) on page 7 includes provision for 18 month old cards to counted in the 30% for employees petitioning for a union election. However, decertification on page 12, Sec. 23-907(J)(2), says that cards can be no older than 6 months. Regardless of what the Public Employee Relations Act states, this does not seem logical or reasonable. Both timeframes should be the same at 6 months.

If this bill is truly designed to empower workers, the most important amendment needed is to strike lines 33-38 on page 8 and lines 1-5 on page 9 to ensure that library workers are able to exercise their democratic rights by engaging in a vote. [Sec. 23-907(D)(3)] This section of the



bill states that if 50% of the eligible members of a bargaining unit sign a card, that a union has been formed. *Allow workers to engage in a vote with 30% of the eligible signatures.*

I appreciate the amendment of revising “governing body” to “governing body of the applicable county.” *There is still ample opportunity for confusion about roles and responsibilities within the bill that would benefit from additional attention.* No distinction is made between the roles of the Director and of the Board of Library Trustees; they are referred to as “the Employer” as if they are one entity. Sec. 23-908(A) This seriously muddies the existing education code with respect to public libraries which endeavors to delineate what Boards are responsible for and what duties are the responsibility of the Library Director. Library Boards are responsible for policy and governance, in most systems they would be approving the collective bargaining agreement. The Director and administrative staff would be the party negotiating that agreement. Leaving this vagueness in the bill is counterproductive and will shift responsibility for clarity to the Attorney General who has had to weigh in on other sections of code relating to public libraries when roles were not defined.

Most of the timing detailed in the bill does not match the budget cycles of local jurisdictions. See Sec. 909(A)(1) and Sec. 23-909(D)(10). Bargaining units negotiating for changes to salary would likely be informed by their colleagues in library administration of the actual deadlines to put requests before their local funding bodies. As written, this bill would lead to frustration and wasted time for all parties involved. *Recommend referring to local budget schedules in a general manner as each jurisdiction across the state has a different process and different timing.*

Finally, I request that Sec. 23-912(B) (lines 9-11 on page 22) *be struck from the bill.* This sentence has the potential to subvert existing state law which gives Boards of Library Trustees the right to establish personnel policies for their library systems.

I urge your support of amendments to SB0591 to ensure that this bill is supportive of our state’s well respected public library systems, highly trained and talented library workers, dedicated library boards and our primary funding bodies, local government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carrie Willson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Carrie Willson
Executive Director, Calvert Library