



Testimony in support of SB0591: Education—Public Libraries—Collective Bargaining (Library Workers Empowerment Act)
Hearing before the Finance Committee
February 28, 2024
Submitted by Tonya Aikens, Howard County Library System President & CEO

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

I am writing to express support, *with amendments*, for **SB0591: Education—Public Libraries—Collective Bargaining (Library Workers Empowerment Act)**, which would allow public library staff to join collective bargaining units.

Howard County has had enabling legislation since 2013, and our staff recently elected (through a secret ballot election) to be represented by AFSCME. While the current law works well for our system, we can support SB0591 *with the following substantive amendments*:

- **Page 1, lines 16-21:** Delete the section to repeal Howard County's existing legislation. Both Howard County and AFSCME are operating under the provisions of this bill without issue.
- **Page 3, line 6:** Change "governing" body to "funding" body to accurately define the role of libraries' Board of Trustees (defining a term referencing County government). As stated in Education Article 23.401, "Each county public library system shall be governed by a board of trustees." Only one library system in Maryland is a county agency; the rest are *governed* by a board of trustees and are *funded* by their county government.
- **Page 4, lines 1-5:** Exempt Howard County and Pratt Library, or delay their inclusion in the bill until FY26, since they are waiting or currently in the process of negotiating agreements. Including them in the current bill would be a waste of the public dollars that have been invested in the process thus far. It is not fair to the employees, library systems, and Boards who have been engaged in the process in good faith.
- **Page 7, lines 8 and 27:** Change 18 months to 6 months, in order to maximize the number of eligible staff (referring to how old signature cards can be) and to be consistent with the six months requirement for decertification of a union.
- **Page 8, lines 2 and 13:** Change 2 calendar days to 2 business days and 1 calendar day to 2 business days to follow standard business practices of business vs calendar days (referring to days it takes to give a list of employees who are eligible to be in the bargaining unit to the neutral decision maker).
- **Page 8, lines 33 -35 and page 9 lines 1-5:** These sections state that if an organizer gets 50 percent of the signatures of employees, then no vote is necessary and a union is formed. Amend to 30 percent of signatures triggers an election in every case. *Voting in elections by secret ballot at every level is a hallmark of our democracy, and we should not circumvent that process.*
- **Page 10, lines 14-15:** Amend to include the Organization. Both parties should have the right to request a preferred method of voting.
- **Page 10, lines 17-18:** Amend to include the Organization. Both parties' proposals, to decide the method of voting, should be considered by the neutral decision maker.

- **Page 12, line 33:** State law exists (Education Article 23.406) that dictates the handling of personnel, appeals, grievances, and disciplinary action. Amend this line to include the Board of Library Trustees, State Library Board, and arbitration, if needed.
- **Page 18, line 20:** Change 5 calendar days to 14 business days to give adequate response time to convene a Board of Trustees meeting and allow adequate public notice for a public meeting (referring to days it would take to have the Trustees ratify decisions of a mediator that do not have a fiscal impact).

We have discussed these amendments with Senator Lam, the bill sponsor.

I urge your support of amendments to **Senate Bill 591 Education – Public Libraries – Collective Bargaining (Library Workers Empowerment Act)**.

Thank you for your support of Maryland libraries.

Sincerely,

Tonya Aikens,
President & CEO