

FAVORABLE

Senate Bill 576

Labor and Employment – Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters – Employee Attendance and Participation (Maryland Worker Freedom Act)

**Finance Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 576. Senate Bill 576 prohibits an employer from engaging in adverse employment actions, such as discharge or discipline of an employee, if the employee declines to attend or participate in an employer-sponsored meeting during which the employer communicates their opinion regarding religious or political matters, including the employer's view on the decision to join a labor union.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Employers routinely deploy captive audience meetings as a union-busting tactic. Often, when workers seek to organize together and form a union an employer in response will require workers to attend mandatory meetings where they are subjected to anti-union propaganda and may not have the right to ask questions or hear differing viewpoints on the subject matter. Research that examined elections conducted by the National Labor Relations Board between 1999 – 2003 showed that 89% of employers conducted captive audience meetings in response to unionization efforts by their employees.¹ The same research found that captive audience meetings

¹ Daniel Perez and Jennifer Sherer, Tackling the problem of 'captive audience' meetings: How states are stepping up to protect workers' rights and freedoms. Economic Policy Institute (October 24, 2023), <https://www.epi.org/blog/captive-audience-meetings/>.

caused the average union election win rate to decline from 73% to 47%.² Employers spend an estimated \$400 million a year utilizing the services of union avoidance consultants who specialize in defeating unionization drives, often by using captive audience meetings as part of their union-defeating tactics.³

In response to these tactics, more states are enacting legislation to ensure employees may opt out of these meetings without fear of retaliation by their employers.⁴ Workers should not fear retaliation by their employers for declining to participate in a meeting where their employer is sharing their opinion on religious or political matters. Senate Bill 576 will provide workers with the protection they need to exercise their own choice in determining whether to attend these types of meetings.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 576.

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ Id.