Secular Maryland https://secularmaryland.dorik.io secularmaryland@tutanota.com

February 19, 2025

SB 576 - FAV

Labor and Employment - Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters - Employee Attendance and Participation (Protecting Workers From Captive Audience Meetings Act)

Dear Chair Pamela Beidle, Vice-Chair Katherine Klausmeier, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Seven states, Connecticut, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, and Washington have enacted laws designed to protect employees' dignity and freedom of thought and association by prohibiting employers from requiring employees to attend employer-sponsored meetings intended to communicate the employer's opinions on religious or political matter that are unrelated to job tasks or performance. Secular Maryland enthusiastically endorses this bill, which empowers workers to opt out of unwelcome political and religious speech by protecting them from financial harm or retaliation if they choose not to attend such meetings.

The 2010 Supreme Court decision Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission gave employers the green light to hold political captive audience meetings. In the absence of a collective bargaining agreement, most workers are considered "at-will" employees who can be terminated at any time. Employers can exercise vast authority over employees' lives, including their political activities or freedom of association.

Fortunately, states can legislate to protect workers from unwanted speech, as affirmed by the Supreme Court's 1988 ruling Frisby v. Schultz.

A 2015 study [Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. (2016). How Employers Recruit Their Workers into Politics—And Why Political Scientists Should Care. Perspectives on Politics. 14. 410-421. 10.1017/S1537592716000098.] revealed how widespread political communication is in U.S. workplaces. One in four U.S. workers has been contacted by their employer regarding a political matter. Of these workers, 20% (representing 5% of all U.S. workers) received messages from their boss that included one or more threats of job loss, business closure, or changes to wages and hours. Under current federal labor and employment laws, it is perfidiously legal for an employer to threaten, discipline, or terminate an employee for objecting to their boss's political views.

Mathew Goldstein

3838 Early Glow Ln

Bowie, MD

.