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## **SB576: Labor and Employment – Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters – Employee Attendance and Participation (Maryland Worker Freedom Act)**

**Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee, February 19, 2025**

### **Position: FAVORABLE**

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Workplace Justice Project supports workers' rights to fair compensation and dignity in the workplace. **The PJC supports SB576, which prohibits an employer from retaliating against an employee who declines to attend or participate in an employer-sponsored meeting during which the employer communicates their views regarding religious or political matters, including their views on unionization.**

#### **The problem:**

- **“Captive audience” meetings, or mandatory meetings called by an employer to express their views against unionization, are a tool frequently used by employers as a union-busting tactic.** Maryland law currently allows employers to require workers to attend these meetings and force workers to listen to the employer’s religious or political views, including views discouraging workers from organizing and participating in a union.
- **Maryland law currently does not protect employers from retaliating against workers or job applicants who choose not to attend or participate in captive audience meetings.** Most workers are “at will,” meaning that employers can terminate them at any time and for any reason unless doing so would violate the law or a collective bargaining agreement. Low-wage workers—who are disproportionately women, people of color, and immigrants—may feel particularly compelled to attend captive audience meetings so as not to risk being penalized or fired, which would impair their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

#### **SB576’s solution:**

- **SB576 would prohibit an employer from retaliating or threatening to retaliate against an employee for declining to attend or participate in an employer-sponsored meeting during which the employer communicates views on religious or political matters.** Importantly, SB576 does not prohibit employer speech on religious or political matters. It simply clarifies that if an employer holds a meeting involving religious or political matters, employee attendance and participation must be *voluntary*, and that the employer cannot retaliate against any workers or job applicants who choose not to attend or participate.

- **Workers should have the freedom to opt out of meetings where employers are communicating personal religious or political views.** Indeed, many other states, including Connecticut, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and Oregon, have passed similar legislation, recognizing the importance of guarding against political and religious coercion in the workplace.

For the foregoing reasons, the PJC **SUPPORTS SB576** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report. If you have any questions, please call Lucy Zhou at 410-625-9409 ext. 245.