

UFCW 1994

Testimony in favor of Senate Bill 976

UFCW 1994/MCGEO supports county and municipal public sector employees in Montgomery County and Prince George's County. We join AFSCME in strong support of Senate Bill 976, which will extend collective bargaining rights to county and municipal employees across Maryland.

It's not hard to see why, in this era, when federal public sectors are under attack, state and local workers are seeking the stability and benefits that a union contract provides. What surprises many is that for many city employees, joining a union is not an option or a right.

Of the municipalities across Maryland, only about 10 percent of municipalities have actual collective bargaining rights. Those rights are based on separate codes – offering different paths to recognition.

Unfortunately, until we have a uniform path to labor representation, they may have to wait up to two years before they even have a chance to make that choice. And when they finally get it, they may come up with a city ordinance that essentially denies them the ability to resolve disputes through arbitration.

In District Heights, employees spent 17 months waiting to get to the point where they can officially choose a representative. In July 2023, employees came to our union. No one in the city came out in opposition. The charter amendment was unanimously passed in October. But the union is still waiting on the City to come up with a labor code.

In Laurel, Maryland, workers signed cards to get representation in October 2022. It took until November 2023 for a code to get completed – and in the end it was a code without a way to resolve impasse or arbitrate procedures. In addition, the city felt that it had to hire union busting law firm costing local taxpayers almost 90 thousand dollars. City employees paid those taxes.

Whether a municipal worker wants a union is his or her decision. And it's hard to find any public official in Maryland who openly opposes that right. But the actual process for them to make that choice is drawn out to a degree that makes the process expensive and time consuming. It requires lobbying for and passing charter amendments and labor codes. The cities have to hire legal consultants. In some cases, they have to deal with a 'labor commissioner.' It's a time consuming and expensive process for all parties involved.

It is long past time to work together to streamline this process and offer public sector workers in Maryland the rights to collectively bargain. This is not a budgetary issue. It's about the right of local workers to bargain collectively, just as they would in the private sector. If you feel that they have that right, show it by voting for this bill.

