



# MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**SB 576 - Labor and Employment - Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters -  
Employee Attendance and Participation  
(Maryland Worker Freedom Act)  
Senate Finance Committee  
February 19, 2025**

## **SUPPORT**

**Donna S. Edwards  
President  
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 576. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 300,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

“Captive audience” meetings encourage unfair practices by undermining the fundamental rights of employees to decide for themselves whether or not to attend an employer-sponsored meeting, discussing political or religious matters while on the job. Under current law, employers have the power to make these meetings mandatory, oftentimes using intimidating or manipulating measures to enforce attendance. Many times, employees face dismissal, threats of being fired, refusal to hire, or other penalization if they choose not to attend. This creates a biased and tenuous work environment where employees are not free to make their own decisions and feel that they must agree with their employer’s views.

In 2023, Maryland took a significant step in protecting workers by passing HB 984, the Public Employee Relations Act, which included provisions that prohibited public employers from forcing employees to attend mandatory meetings where they share their personal beliefs on political or religious matters. SB 576 builds on this progress by expanding these protections to all sectors in Maryland.

This legislation ensures that employers cannot require attendance at meetings where they share their personal beliefs on political or religious matters, explicitly barring them from using retaliatory practices against employees who choose not to attend. Notably, this legislation does not infringe on an employer’s First and Fourth Amendment rights as they are free to hold these meetings. Rather, it gives the worker the freedom to not attend meetings or leave the meetings where politics and religion are discussed, creating a fair workplace where employees are free to form and hold their own opinions without fear of intimidation or retaliation.

SB 576 is a necessary step in protecting the rights of *all* workers in Maryland, promoting workplace fairness, and preventing the misuse of employer power. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report of SB 576.