

SEIU Local 500 Testimony in Support of SB 976.pdf

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Position: FAV



Testimony - SB 976, Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public
Employee Relations Act
Favorable
Senate Finance Committee
February 27, 2025
Christopher C. Cano, MPA
Director of Political & Legislative Affairs on Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairwoman Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

SEIU Local 500, as one of Maryland's largest public sector unions representing over 23,000 workers, expresses our strong support for Senate Bill 976, the **Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act**. This critical piece of legislation represents a significant step toward improving fair labor practices, improving workplace conditions, and fostering productive relationships between public employees and their employers.

Public employees play a critical role in maintaining the well-being of our communities. They provide essential services, including public safety, sanitation, transportation, and administrative support, all of which are foundational to the functioning of our local governments. However, many of these dedicated workers lack meaningful collective bargaining rights, leaving them vulnerable to inconsistent employment policies, inadequate wages, and limited avenues for addressing workplace concerns.

Senate Bill 976 introduces key provisions that will bring much-needed fairness and structure to labor relations at the local government level. Specifically, the bill:

1. **Establishes Collective Bargaining Rights** – It ensures that local government employees have the ability to negotiate wages, hours, and working conditions through authorized representatives.
2. **Creates Impasse Procedures with Binding Arbitration** – By including an arbitration process for dispute resolution, the bill promotes fair negotiations and prevents prolonged labor disputes that can disrupt public services.

3. **Maintains Local Control with Statewide Standards** – While allowing counties and municipalities to adopt local labor laws, the bill also ensures that those laws comply with statewide labor standards, fostering consistency and fairness.
4. **Enhances Transparency and Accountability** – Requiring public employers to submit collective bargaining agreements for public record strengthens accountability and encourages responsible governance.

The ability to collectively bargain is a fundamental right that provides workers with a voice in their workplace and leads to improved working conditions, higher job satisfaction, and better service delivery for the public. States and municipalities that have implemented robust collective bargaining frameworks have demonstrated that these policies lead to more stable and efficient labor relations.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 976 respects the rights of both employees and employers by establishing a structured, transparent, and fair negotiation process. It prevents any single party from having undue leverage while ensuring that employees have the representation they need to advocate for their well-being.

We urge the members of the Senate Finance Committee to support Senate Bill 976 and vote in favor of its passage. By doing so, you will be taking a significant step toward ensuring that Maryland's public employees receive the fair treatment and protections they deserve.

We appreciate Senator Lam's leadership on this critical issue and look forward to your support of this important legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Christopher C. Cano, MPA
Director of Political & Legislative Affairs
SEIU Local 500

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Position: FAV



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Testimony of David Maher
SB 976 – Collective Bargaining – Local Government Employees and Public Employees
Relations Act
Finance Committee
Support / Favorable

My firm represents AFSCME Maryland Council 3. We also represent firefighters, teachers, county and municipal employees, and many other public employees. We routinely practice before Public Employee Relations Board, as well as the National Labor Relations Board for our private sector clients.

Two years ago, the General Assembly took the important step of modernizing, reforming, and consolidating Maryland's then-fragmented state labor laws into a single common body of labor law applicable to State employees, public school employees, and higher education employees. The Public Employee Relations Act created a single, professional and expert labor board, the Public Employee Relations Board, to administer this new labor law.

However, at the county and municipal level, employees face the same patchwork of laws, rights, and procedures which PERA fixed for state, public school, and higher education employees. Public-sector employees are exempt from the National Labor Relations Act, and current Maryland law leaves collective bargaining rights, unionization rights, and all other labor rights of county or municipal employees entirely up to the individual counties and municipalities. The result is that some county employees have strong labor rights and protections, and some have no rights or protections at all. Some counties and municipalities have well-developed union recognition procedures, bargaining practices, and remedies for unfair labor practices, while some have none whatsoever.

Unfortunately, employees of the majority of Maryland counties, and the overwhelming majority of municipalities, have no labor rights or protections at all. They cannot start a union, vote to be represented by a union, bargain with their employer, or be represented in grievances by their union. Employees of these jurisdictions may be terminated for engaging in union activity, and are completely without legal protection for engaging in the sort of activities which is protected under State and federal law for state employees and private sector employees.

SB 976 would extend collective bargaining rights to these employees. It provides rights equal to those found under the National Labor Relations Act, and permits a process for employees to form a union and vote for whether a union will represent them. It consolidates administration under the PERB, which has the expertise and power to enforce unfair labor practices and run elections.

SB 976 recognizes that local governments may have different needs and operations, and thus permits jurisdictions to adopt certain laws regarding the administration of collective bargaining. SB 976 creates a floor of rights and procedures, as well as the opportunity for jurisdictions to create local modifications. The county or municipality may petition the PERB for exemptions and, if local law is determined to comport with the Act's requirements, the local government will be exempted from portions of the law.

The following chart summarizes the effect on individual counties¹:

Allegany ² Anne Arundel Baltimore City Baltimore County Howard Montgomery Prince George's	<p>Currently has strong and sophisticated collective bargaining laws</p> <p>May qualify for exemption with no or minimal local legislation, or modification to impasse procedure</p> <p>One year delay to July 1, 2026 in implementation to permit county to pursue exemption</p>
Cecil Charles Frederick Harford	<p>Has collective bargaining laws for a limited set of employees, or collective bargaining law is substantially limited regarding scope of bargaining and rights of employees</p> <p>Significant local legislation required in order to qualify for exemption.</p> <p>Subject to floor created by SB 976 effective July 1, 2025</p>
Calvert Caroline Carroll Dorchester Garrett Kent Queen Anne's Somerset St. Mary's Talbot Washington Wicomico Worcester	<p>No or minimal existing collective bargaining laws.</p> <p>May craft legislation to qualify for exemption</p> <p>Subject to floor created by SB 976 effective July 1, 2025</p>

¹ Certain existing employees, for example Sheriffs Deputies, are subject to a more complicated issue of overlapping state and local law, and are not addressed in this table.

² Allegany County was inadvertently omitted from the original draft, but will be included in amendment.

SB 976_AFSCME3_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Denise Gilmore

Position: FAV



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Patrick Moran – President

**SB976 – Collective Bargaining –
Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act
Finance Committee
February 27, 2025**

FAVORABLE

AFSCME Council 3 supports Senate Bill 976. Senate Bill 976 will extend collective bargaining rights to county and municipal employees across Maryland, who do not currently have the freedom to collectively bargain. Additionally, the legislation will establish a framework of consistent rights, obligations, and duties of local government employees, exclusive representatives, and employers. Under the bill, local governments will benefit from streamlined administrative representation and certification procedures that would be handled by the Public Employee Relations Board.

AFSCME Council 3 represents approximately 45,000 state, county, and municipal employees across Maryland. From Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, AFSCME members are on the frontlines everyday making it possible for our communities to function. However, not all local government public employees across Maryland enjoy the freedom to choose collective bargaining.

Currently, twelve counties, half of the jurisdictions in Maryland, do not have collective bargaining rights for county employees.¹ In addition, jurisdictions vary on whether their ordinances specify bargaining unit determinations, dispute resolution processes for bargaining, resolving and settling grievances, or explicitly identifying unfair labor practices, i.e., prohibited conduct by the employer and exclusive representative.

Historically, the evolution of Maryland's public sector collective bargaining rights for public employees has been incremental, piecemeal, and has resulted in a varied patchwork of differing laws that create an uneven system of rights, duties, and obligations for public employees, exclusive representatives, and employers. Frequently, members of the General Assembly are presented with local delegation bills that would extend collective bargaining rights to certain categories of public employees in jurisdictions across Maryland. However, our state does not need to continue with this haphazard practice. Senate Bill 976 will extend freedoms to public servants, streamline administrative processes and procedures, and create a more efficient system of public sector labor relations across Maryland.

The General Assembly has bucked historical practice and enacted recent reforms that promote uniformity in public sector labor relations. In the 2023 session, the General Assembly passed, and Governor Moore signed into law, the Public Employee Relations Act.² Among other things, this

¹ The twelve counties are: Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Dorchester, Garrett, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Worcester.

² Chapter 114, 2023 Laws of Maryland, https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/chapters_noln/Ch_114_hb0984E.pdf.

legislation dissolved three different public sector labor relations boards into one Public Employee Relations Board, consolidated various definitional terms, rights, duties, and procedures concerning public sector labor relations for state, higher education, community college, and public school employees, and enumerated unfair labor practices by public employers and exclusive representatives.³

Opponents to this legislation may argue that this legislation imposes a “one-size-fits all” system that does not respect or acknowledge the differences and variances that may exist across jurisdictions and that local control needs to be preserved. This argument is unpersuasive and without merit because it fails to recognize the adaptability and flexibility of collective bargaining as a practice and procedure, which is supported by nearly 100 years of precedent with collective bargaining in our country.

Originally enacted in 1935, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) has governed private sector labor relations across the United States for ninety years. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has broad jurisdiction over the private sector to administer and enforce the provisions of the Act over a vast array of industries including healthcare, private educational institutions, telecommunications, aerospace, retail, warehouse, transportation, the tech industry, non-profits, restaurants, and more. Regardless of the industry, collective bargaining provides the parties the flexibility to negotiate issues and topics that are unique and important to workers and management. The adaptability and success of collective bargaining derives from the fact that laws establishing collective bargaining build a common framework for parties to operate within but leave labor and management with broad space to negotiate and resolve disputes in a peaceful manner that are suitable for their workplace.

Public sector collective bargaining is no different in this regard. Private and public sector labor laws, regardless of industry, possess common elements including: i) defining key terms; ii) establishing employee, employer, and exclusive representative rights; iii) providing the procedures for the election of the exclusive representative; iv) establishing appropriate bargaining units; v) instituting the duty to bargain in good faith; vi) establishing dispute resolution procedures and the peaceful settlement of grievances; and vii) enumerating unfair labor practices that neither management nor labor unions may commit.

Senate Bill 976 possesses the same features outlined above for local government employees, employers, and exclusive representatives. The bill establishes key terms; rights, duties, and obligations for local government employees, employers, and exclusive representatives; election procedures; and dispute resolution procedures. The bill alleviates administrative burden from local government employers by requiring the PERB to manage questions of certification and unfair labor practice charges that may arise between management and exclusive representatives. Moreover, the bill provides flexibility to local governments with an exemption opportunity from the bill’s requirements if the local government files a petition with the PERB and the PERB determines the local government’s laws comply with the law and the Public Employee Relations Act. In sum, this legislation extends collective bargaining rights to local government employees, establishes streamlined administrative processes and procedures for public sector labor relations, and provides local government employers with flexibility to opt out of the law’s requirements if they currently maintain local laws that comply with the requirements of the bill and the Public Employee Relations Act. **We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 976.**

³ *Id.*

SB 976 - Collective Bargaining - Local Government

Uploaded by: Donna Edwards

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**SB 976 - Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee
Relations Act
Senate Finance Committee
February 27, 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 submit testimony in support of SB 976. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

Collective bargaining is an important tool for workers in the fight for equity, social justice, and inclusion—it is the ultimate expression of our First Amendment rights protecting freedom of association and speech. Through forming and joining unions, employees are given a voice in improving their wages, benefits, and working conditions.

SB 976 establishes a consistent and equitable framework for collective bargaining for local government employees, employers and their representatives. This approach provides for more consistency, as currently, 12 counties comprising half the jurisdictions in Maryland (Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Dorchester, Garrett, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Worcester) do not allow collective bargaining for all county employees. Additionally, jurisdictions vary on their ordinances in regards to bargaining procedures.

The evolution of Maryland's public sector collective bargaining rights has been a patchwork of differing laws that created an uneven system of rights, duties, and obligations for public employees, exclusive representatives, and employers. This disjointed approach is time consuming and treats workers' essential rights like something they need to beg for before they can exercise them.

Public sector collective bargaining, as proposed in this bill, has similar elements to private sector collective bargaining. It establishes key terms, rights, duties, obligations for local government employees, employers and exclusive representatives, and requires processes for elections and dispute resolutions. To reduce administrative burdens, this bill also calls upon the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) to manage certification questions and unfair labor practice charges. In addition, this bill also provides a level of flexibility for local governments to be exempt from the bill's requirements provided that they submit a petition to the PERB and the board determines that the locality's laws comply with the Public Employee Relations Act.

SB 976 reinforces our state's commitment to equity by ensuring that county and municipal employees have the same rights and protections as their peers in the private sector and in counties where collective bargaining is already permitted.

For these reasons, we strongly urge a favorable vote on SB 976.

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Uploaded by: john barry

Position: FAV

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.

sb976 collective bargaining, public employees FIN

Uploaded by: Lee Hudson

Position: FAV



Delaware-Maryland Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Testimony Prepared for the
Finance Committee
on
Senate Bill 976
February 27, 2025
Position: **Favorable**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to support the dignity of human effort by acknowledging the human right to organize and bargain collectively. I am Lee Hudson, assistant to the bishop for public policy in the Delaware-Maryland Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are a faith community with three judicatories in every part of our State.

Our community supports the human rights of workers, to include a right to organize and bargain collectively in the interest of fair wages and safe and just work conditions.

A 2017 message among us concerning human rights as principle and instrument, affirmed a 1999 ELCA statement about justice in the *oikos*, the economy. Among the pillars of economic justice is, *(t)he principle of participation (meaning) all are entitled to be heard and to have their interests considered when decisions are made.* Support for the right to organize and bargain is in the written record of the predecessor bodies of our church going back at least to the 1930s; it is in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and it has been law in the United States since 1935.

Our community supports a right to organize and bargain by workers, and as we earlier supported the like *Senate Bill 166*, we do so again for **Senate Bill 976**. That right is an inherent human right, we hold and extending it to all classes of workers is a justice interest we support. We encourage your favorable report.

Lee Hudson

SB 976 - MML - UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Bill Jorch

Position: UNF



Maryland Municipal League
The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

February 27, 2025

Committee: Senate Finance Committee

Bill: SB 976 - Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

Position: Unfavorable

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League (MML) is in opposition to Senate Bill 976. The bill allows all local government employees to collectively bargain for certain wages and benefits through a union; it also mandates a binding arbitration process in the case of an impasse in negotiations.

Currently about 15 municipal governments allow some employees to collectively bargain but the employer has discretion to craft the parameters around the collective bargaining process. For instance, the municipal government may select the category of employee eligible (ex. police, fire, public works, trades), which aspects of a compensation package may be collectively bargained, and whether there is binding arbitration. This flexibility is critical as it allows the local government to determine the impact on its workforce and governmental operations.

While SB 976 does not mandate that local government employees collectively bargain, it does provide the opportunity to all 24,000 municipal employees where currently it is provided at the employer's choice. Not all employees will take advantage of this new option, but many will. Any increase in the number of employees that collectively bargain will result in increased costs to that government as employees who collectively bargain typically see higher salaries and benefits. Some municipal governments are better situated to absorb such a cost increase while others are not.

Additionally, there will be a significant additional administrative burden should all municipal employees choose to collectively bargain. Municipal governments are somewhat unique as employers in that they have many categories of employees. This would result in municipal governments negotiating separately with several unions and then managing several unique and nuanced contracts, one for each category of employees. Municipal governments that negotiate and manage multiple contracts will have increased administrative requirements and potentially stiff penalties for non-compliance with those contracts.

For these reasons, the Maryland Municipal League respectfully asks for an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 976. Please contact Bill Jorch, Director, Public Policy and Research at billj@mdmunicipal.org for more information. Thank you for your consideration.

SB0976-FIN_MACo_OPP.pdf

Uploaded by: Karrington Anderson

Position: UNF



Senate Bill 976

Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Finance Committee

Date: February 27, 2025

From: Karrington Anderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 976. This bill mandates collective bargaining rights for local government employees statewide, imposing binding arbitration requirements, and significantly altering local government labor relations. SB 976 represents an unfunded mandate that would force counties to divert resources from essential public services, undermining fiscal responsibility, operational flexibility, and local control.

Currently, counties manage labor relations through locally determined policies that reflect the unique needs of their workforce and financial constraints. SB 976 removes this discretion by requiring all counties, large and small, to engage through a State-mandated collective bargaining, under a one-size-fits-all state framework, with no exceptions. Moreover, the bill mandates binding arbitration, transferring critical budgetary and personnel decisions to third-party arbitrators who may be unfamiliar with local fiscal realities, and do not share the public accountability of local elected officials. The financial impact of SB 976 on counties would be substantial and unsustainable. Without dedicated state or federal funding, counties will be forced to absorb significant costs associated with labor negotiations, arbitration, and contract implementation.

The unpredictability of arbitration decisions could force counties to either increase taxes or cut critical public services such as education, emergency response, and infrastructure to accommodate costly labor agreements. SB 976 would impose bureaucratic delays and limit workforce flexibility, reducing the ability of county governments to manage their employees efficiently. The inclusion of binding arbitration as the final decision-making mechanism removes incentives for collaborative negotiations and could lead to protracted disputes. Additionally, provisions allowing public employees to strike pose a significant risk to essential public services, particularly public safety and emergency response operations.

Many counties already have collective bargaining structures in place that have been developed through decades of negotiation. This bill fails to account for these long-standing agreements, potentially nullifying the ability to continue with locally negotiated contracts and forcing counties into an unfamiliar and more adversarial bargaining system. Under SB 976, counties who have enjoyed a

smoothly-functioning relationship and process with their employee bargaining units would have those structures overhauled, to comply with this new, narrow vision for one particular style of bargaining.

MACo supports fair and competitive employment policies, which Maryland jurisdictions have pursued through the years both locally and through State-level authorizing legislation. SB 976 represents an overreach of State authority, and a rigid and unwelcome unfunded mandate that could have serious financial and operational consequences for local governments. MACo urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report on SB 976.

SB796_UNFAV_HCG.pdf

Uploaded by: Lawrence Richardson

Position: UNF

ROBERT G. CASSILLY
Harford County Executive



ROBERT S. McCORD
Director of Administration

February 26, 2025

Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair
Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Letter of Opposition on SB976 – Collective Bargaining – Local Government Employees and Public Employees Relations Act

Dear Chairwoman Beidle and Committee Members,

Senate Bill 976 expands collective bargaining rights to public employees of local governments. Specifically, this legislation serves as an unfunded mandate for collective bargaining rights for local government employees statewide, imposes binding arbitration requirements, and significantly alters local government labor relations. As noted by others, this could force counties to divert resources from essential public services, undermining fiscal responsibility, operational flexibility, and local control.

Currently, counties manage labor relations through locally determined policies that reflect the unique needs of workforce and financial constraints. This legislation would require all counties to engage in collective bargaining under a one-size-fits-all state framework, overriding local decision-making.

This would essentially transfer critical budgetary and personnel decisions to third-party arbitrators who may be unfamiliar with local fiscal realities. The potential financial impact this could have on counties such as Harford would be substantial and unsustainable. Without dedicated State or federal funding, counties will be forced to absorb significant costs associated with labor negotiations, arbitration, and contract implementation. This unpredictability could easily force counties to either increase taxes or cut critical public services such as education and emergency response to accommodate costly agreements.

I respectfully request that the Finance Committee report unfavorably on SB976.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Cassilly", is written over a faint, larger blue signature.

Robert G. Cassilly

SB0976-FIN-UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: UNF



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

SB 0976

February 27, 2025

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of the Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 0976 – Collective Bargaining – Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

POSITION: OPPOSE

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **opposes** Senate Bill (SB) 0976.

SB 0976 establishes, in part, collective bargaining rights for public local employees, and the application of the Maryland Public Employee Relations Act to county and municipal government employers and their employees. The proposed bill also allows for certain management employees to be considered “public employees” for purposes of establishing collective bargaining rights. The proposed bill also establishes an impasse procedure for collective bargaining between public local employees and their employers that include binding arbitration. Lastly, the legislation also allows local jurisdictions to establish local laws governing the collective bargaining activity and its related procedures.

While the intent of SB 0976 may be to address labor disputes and improve working conditions for public-sector employees, we believe this legislation poses significant risks to fiscal responsibility, operational efficiency, and the autonomy of local governments to make decisions in the best interest of their communities. This Bill also fails to provide adequate consideration for jurisdictions like the City of Baltimore, that have a rich and robust collective bargaining history.

1. Fiscal Impact on The City of Baltimore and Taxpayers

One of the central concerns regarding this bill is the potential for increased financial strain on the City of Baltimore. For Fiscal Year 2026, the City faces a \$90+ Million budget deficit. Difficult decisions regarding service delivery will be necessary to close the projected gap.

Binding arbitration, while a viable mechanism for resolving some disputes, can lead to significant and inestimable cost increases for the City of Baltimore. Arbitrators, many of whom reside outside of Maryland, may award settlements that are beyond the City’s budgetary capacity, ultimately resulting in either tax increases for residents or cuts to essential services.¹ Additionally, the unpredictability and unbudgeted escalation of labor costs produced

¹ The City of Baltimore already assesses the highest property tax in the State, increased labor costs resulting from binding arbitration will undoubtedly result in cuts to services to residents of the City.

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<https://mogr.baltimorecity.gov/>

by binding arbitration could undermine fiscal stability, causing the City to divert funds from vital community needs such as education, public safety, and infrastructure to cover the costs of arbitral awards for collective bargaining agreements (“CBA’s”).

In short, as the City struggles with budget constraints and competing priorities, the prospect of agreements with substantial immediate and legacy costs imposed by third-party arbitrators with no vested interest in the outcome of their decisions, could lead to unsustainable spending and ultimately result in draconian measures like layoffs, furloughs and other budget balancing measures that would not only have a negative impact on the bargaining relationship of the parties, but on the citizens at large as operations are adversely impacted by the binding arbitral awards. These potential adverse outcomes would become a reality for counties and municipalities who rely on continuity in the budgeting process to meet the ever-evolving needs of citizens with limited resources.

2. Undermining Local Control and Autonomy

The City of Baltimore adopted its Home Rule Charter under the relevant provisions of Article XIA of the State Constitution in 1918. The Home Rule Charter takes away from the State Legislature the control over all major phases of local government and vests it in people most concerned - the voters and taxpayers of Baltimore City. Providing a fair and equitable workplace for public-sector employees can be achieved without doing violence to our traditional concepts of autonomy within local governance.

Local governments are in the best position to understand the unique needs and priorities of their communities. By mandating binding arbitration, this Bill takes away essential decision-making authority from locally elected officials, who are directly accountable to their constituents. Binding arbitration transfers power over key financial and operational decisions to third-party arbitrators who may not have a clear understanding of local circumstances and more importantly, have no connection to the community that their decisions will impact. This shift undermines the principles of local self-governance and reduces the ability of elected officials to manage their budgets and resources according to the specific needs of the community they serve. A better approach would be to require the parties upon reaching impasse to engage in mediation and subsequent fact finding. The local government should have the autonomy to either accept, reject, or implement in part the award of the neutral in the fact finding. This approach has served the City of Baltimore well in its long history of collective bargaining.

Notably, the Bill does not include local education agencies (“LEAs”), community colleges, public libraries, all instrumentalities of the State.

3. Adverse Impact on Service Delivery and Workforce Flexibility

Local governments require flexibility in negotiating labor agreements and managing their workforce. As mentioned previously, expanding binding arbitration to all exclusive bargaining organizations will potentially hinder the ability of the City to timely reach reasonable agreements with unions, resulting in strained relationships and reduced flexibility. This is particularly true as this Bill provides the unfettered right for public sector unions to strike if impasse is reached. The uncertainty created by this fact when coupled with a less adaptable workforce could lead to inefficiencies, reduced productivity, and lower quality of services for the public. The ability to make necessary and reasonable adjustments to staffing levels, and work hours is critical for local governments to respond effectively to changing needs and fiscal challenges. The unique responsibility of local governments to the general public and the potential disruptions to core government operations caused by labor disputes were major considerations in why public sector employees, including those working for state and local governments were explicitly excluded from the Act in the first instance.

4. Risk of Escalating Labor Disputes

Binding arbitration may inadvertently escalate tensions between local governments and unions by removing the incentive to negotiate collaboratively. The arbitration process can often lead to polarized positions, with each side digging in their heels and becoming less willing to compromise. This conflict is detrimental not only to the working relationship between labor and management but also to the public who depend on the smooth operation of government services. The bill may create a more adversarial environment, where unions may rely more heavily on arbitration as a tool for achieving their goals, leading to more frequent and contentious and costly disputes.

5. Adverse Impact of Established Bargaining History of Jurisdictions with Robust Labor Relations Ordinances

The City of Baltimore has a rich and robust history of collective bargaining. Many of our CBA's are mature. The CBA's are an amalgamation of many years of bargaining with labor stakeholders over wages and other terms and conditions of employment. The current Bill has provisions that undermine and, in some cases, eliminate terms that the parties have bargained to agreement on. For example, the City of Baltimore and the Unions representing the City's workforce have agreed to "no strike or lockout" language that provides that there shall be no strikes, slow ups, or stoppage of work in exchange for the Employer's agreement that there shall be no lockout of employees. The plain language of the Bill provides that public local employees may strike on the declaration of an impasse by either party.

Rather than a one size fits all approach mandating binding arbitration, we encourage lawmakers to explore alternative approaches to resolving labor disputes. Strengthening mediation and facilitating more collaborative processes while recognizing the unique position of local governments and the responsibility owed to the public at large would allow both local governments and their employees to reach fair agreements without the need for costly and binding arbitration. Additionally, providing local governments with more resources to handle negotiations and dispute resolution internally could foster more efficient, cost-effective, win-win solutions.²

For these reasons, we strongly oppose the expansion of collective bargaining with binding arbitration to local public employers. We urge you to consider the long-term consequences of this bill on local budgets, governance, service delivery, and labor relations. We remain committed to working collaboratively with unions and other stakeholders to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all public employees but believe that a more flexible and locally-controlled approach is in the best interest of both workers and the communities they serve.

The BCA respectfully requests an **opposition** report on SB 0976 for these reasons.

² For example, the Bill calls for the creation of a Board with numerous Deputy Directors. The Bill provides no additional resources to Local Governments in facilitating mutually beneficial outcomes in the collective bargaining process.

SB976 Opposition Letter001.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Jarrell

Position: UNF



*Queen
Anne's
County*

County Commissioners:

James J. Moran, At Large
Jack N. Wilson, Jr., District 1
J. Patrick McLaughlin, District 2
Philip L. Dumenil, District 3
Christopher M. Corchiarino, District 4

**THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY**

The Liberty Building
107 North Liberty Street
Centreville, MD 21617

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*County Administrator: Todd R. Mohn, PE
Executive Assistant to County Commissioners: Stephanie Jarrell
County Attorney: Patrick Thompson, Esquire*

February 25, 2025

The Honorable Senator Pamela Beidle
Finance Committee
Senate Office Building
3 West Miller
Annapolis MD 21401

RE: SB 976 – Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations
Act **OPPOSE**

Dear Honorable Beidle,

We, the Queen Anne's County Commissioners, are writing to express our strong opposition for Maryland Senate Bill 976, which mandates collective bargaining rights for local government employees across Maryland; establishes impasse procedures for collective bargaining between public local employers and their employees that includes binding arbitration and authorizes the governing body of a county or municipality to adopt a local law on labor relations. While the intent of this Bill may be to address labor disputes and improve overall working conditions for public sector employees, we believe this legislation poses significant risks to fiscal responsibility, operational efficiency, and the autonomy of local governments to make decisions in the best interest of their communities.

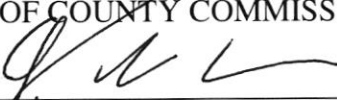
- Senate Bill 976 would require significant financial resources to support collective bargaining negotiations, including the hiring of labor relations attorneys, mediators, and additional Human Resources personnel to manage contracts and disputes.
- Delays in critical hiring necessary to maintain essential functions and delays in performance discipline and workforce management.
- Disciplinary actions and performance management may face increased bureaucracy, hindering employee accountability.
- The bill could limit the County's ability to implement workforce reorganizations or operational changes needed to improve efficiency and effective public service delivery.
- Queen Anne's County employees currently benefit from competitive compensation and benefits, written grievance procedures with a structured appeals process under Section X of the Employee Handbook.
- Our current policies ensure fairness, equal opportunity, and a supportive work environment, making unionization unnecessary.
- The plain language of the Bill provides that public local employees may strike on the declaration of an impasse by either party. Our Employee Handbook provides language for no strikes or lockouts to maintain the critical services of local County government.

Rather than impose a one size fits all approach mandating collective bargaining with binding arbitration, we encourage lawmakers to provide for local autonomy to recognize and support the uniqueness of their workforce.


Therefore, we strongly oppose the expansion of collective bargaining with binding arbitration to local public employers. We urge you to consider the long-term consequences of this bill on local budgets, governance, service delivery, and labor relations. We remain committed to working collaboratively with our workforce to ensure fair and equitable treatment for public employees, offer fair and competitive compensation and benefits, transparent workplace policies, and employee engagement. However, we believe that a more flexible and locally controlled approach is in the best interest of both workers and the communities they serve.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and hope that you will take our opposition into account as the bill moves forward.


QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



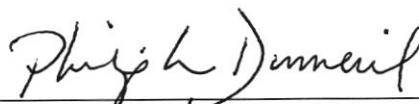
Christopher M. Corchiarino, President



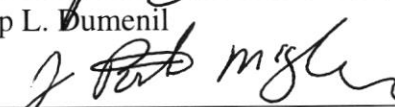
James J. Moran



Jack N. Wilson



Philip L. Dumenil



J. Patrick McLaughlin

SB 976 Letter of Information Nash.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Nash

Position: INFO



FREDERICK

MARYLAND

Letter of Information
SB976: Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act
Finance Committee

February 27, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Committee,

I serve as the City Council President for Maryland's second largest city, the City of Frederick. I offer a letter of information for SB976: Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act. My goal with this letter is to provide additional perspective regarding the implementation of this legislation and our outlook regarding collective bargaining rights for our employees.

A legislative proposal was introduced last year to provide collective bargaining rights for City employees (non-sworn). During our consideration of that proposal, AFSCME Maryland Council 3 weighed in with amendments to improve the legislation. The City of Frederick's Government Operations Committee will consider this legislation and any remaining AFSCME amendments on March 20th. Should the Committee vote to move the legislation forward, the soonest the ordinance could be adopted would be April 3rd. To my knowledge, there is no additional budget required for adopting this ordinance and our management team has not expressed any additional financial obligations.

I've long-heard concerns related to collective bargaining provisions; that somehow enabling employees to work with their management in a constructive way costs money. I believe this is not only a better outcome for City employees but also City residents: informed decisions will help us make better decisions at budget time. We know we will continue to have limited resources and collective bargaining enables tough but productive conversations so we can all do more for those we serve. That said, if we had budget concerns regarding collective bargaining for our employees, we would be talking about those concerns as we approach our Fiscal Year 2026 operating budget considerations next month.

Thank you for considering this point of view in your decision making.

Sincerely,

Katie Nash, Council President
City Council, City of Frederick