



## Eastern Atlantic States REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CARPENTERS

8500 Pennsylvania Avenue, Upper Marlboro, MD 20772 | Phone: 301-735-6660 | EASCARPENTERS.ORG

### Testimony of Mungu Sanchez

On Behalf of the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters

In Support of HB 434 – Courts – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP Suits)

Before the House Judiciary Committee

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mungu Sanchez, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters (EASRCC), which represents thousands of union carpenters across Maryland. Our mission is to protect the rights and livelihoods of hardworking men and women in the construction industry. We strongly support House Bill 434, which strengthens protections against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP suits).

### **The Threat of SLAPP Suits to Union Members and Workers' Rights**

SLAPP suits are an insidious legal tactic used by employers and other powerful entities to silence opposition, intimidate workers, and obstruct organizing efforts. These lawsuits are not about legitimate legal claims; instead, they serve as a weapon to discourage workers and unions from exercising their First Amendment rights to speak out on labor conditions, unfair treatment, or unethical business practices.

Workers and labor organizations play a crucial role in advocating for better wages, benefits, and safe working conditions. However, we have seen firsthand how employers weaponize litigation to stifle these efforts. A frivolous lawsuit, even one without merit, imposes a crippling financial and time burden on unions, diverting resources away from representing workers and fighting for their rights.

### **How HB 434 Protects Workers from Retaliatory Lawsuits**

HB 434 modernizes and strengthens Maryland's anti-SLAPP protections by:

1. Expanding the Definition of SLAPP Suits – The bill broadens protections to include any lawsuit based on acts or statements made in connection with public issues or participation in government proceedings, ensuring workers and their unions are covered when they engage in protected speech.

2. Shifting the Burden to the Plaintiff – The bill places the burden on the filer of the lawsuit to prove that their case has substantial legal merit, preventing baseless lawsuits from dragging on and draining union resources.
3. Providing a Mechanism for Dismissal – HB 434 requires courts to hear motions to dismiss SLAPP suits expeditiously, limiting the financial strain on defendants.
4. Awarding Attorney's Fees for Frivolous Lawsuits – If a SLAPP suit is found to be frivolous, the court may require the plaintiff to pay the legal costs incurred by the union or worker in defending against the lawsuit.

### **The Urgency of Protecting Maryland's Workers**

Unions exist to empower workers, ensure fair wages, and provide a voice on the job. When employers and special interests use the courts to harass labor organizations and suppress speech, they undermine these fundamental rights. HB 434 ensures that Maryland law stands firmly on the side of free speech, worker advocacy, and fair legal processes.

On behalf of the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters and the thousands of workers we represent, we urge this committee give HB 434 a favorable report, and send a clear message that Maryland will not tolerate legal intimidation tactics against workers and unions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mungu Sanchez

Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters