



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**HB 434 - Courts - Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation
House Judiciary Committee
February 12, 2025**

SUPPORT

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

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 434. 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.

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP), are a common litigation practice to intimidate individuals and silence their right to free speech on important public issues, including those of workers advocating for fair wages, safe working conditions, and organizing efforts. These lawsuits, regardless of their outcome, have crippling effects, often discouraging workers' rights, fostering an environment of fear and retaliation, and draining resources.

Maryland's current anti-SLAPP law is narrow and ineffective, allowing for lengthy lawsuits that require extensive discovery from defendants, creating ambiguity in identifying SLAPP suits that exclude certain topics, and placing the financial burden on those targeted. Given this turbulent time in our country and the expansion of SLAPP suits, Maryland must strengthen its current SLAPP law to reinforce its commitment to protecting individuals' right to Freedom of Speech.

HB 434 addresses these weaknesses by making it easier to recognize SLAPP suits and prevent them before they cause unnecessary action. This legislation redefines what is considered a SLAPP suit, protecting individuals by ensuring that lawsuits are filed based on merit, not as a tool for intimidation. Additionally, this legislation holds plaintiffs accountable when they file meritless SLAPP suits by requiring them to cover the defendant's legal fees if the case is dismissed. This alleviates the financial burdens caused by the lawsuit and helps to prevent frivolous legal actions that only serve to silence those who wish to come forward and speak out on workplace issues and other matters of public concern.

Workers should not have to choose between advocating for their rights and risking financial challenges due to a baseless lawsuit. HB 434 provides much-needed protections so Maryland remains a state where workers can speak freely without fear of retaliation through the courts.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on HB 434.