



TESTIMONY

SB0857 Labor and Employment – Civic and Related Activities – Protection (Maryland Employee Civic Activity and Lawful Expression Protection Act)

Bill Sponsor: Senator Waldstreicher

Committee: Senate Finance

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, Co-Chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in support of **SB0857** on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. We are an association of unpaid citizen advocates—individuals and grassroots groups in every district across the state—representing and supporting more than 30,000 Marylanders.

Marylanders do not surrender their First Amendment rights when they go to work, and no employer should be able to punish an employee for participating in democracy. A healthy democracy depends on workers who are free from coercion, intimidation, and surveillance that chills their participation in public life. That freedom includes the right to fight for a living wage, safe working conditions, and basic benefits such as health care and retirement security.

SB0857 protects workers from retaliation when they engage in lawful civic activities or expressive conduct outside the workplace. If an employer punishes a worker within 120 days of the worker taking part in a protected civic activity, the law will assume it was retaliation unless the employer can prove otherwise. The bill also ensures that employers may require an applicant to disclose civic or political activity ONLY when that information is directly relevant to the specific requirements of the job, preventing misuse of the hiring process to screen for ideological alignment, contrary to actions undertaken by our national regime.

SB0857 further prohibits employers from retaliating against workers who refuse to participate in employer-favored political activity, endorsements, donations, or captive-audience meetings. No worker should be pressured to support a political cause, candidate, or message as a condition of employment. These protections

ensure that workplace decisions are based on qualifications—not political pressure or ideological conformity.

Protecting civic expression is as essential to worker dignity as fair wages, safe conditions, and the right to organize. We respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE** report on SB0857.