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**SB 417 – Labor and Employment – Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters –  
Employee Attendance and Participation  
(Maryland Worker Freedom Act)  
Finance Committee  
February 18, 2026**

**FAVORABLE**

AFSCME Maryland Council 3 supports Senate Bill 417. Senate Bill 417 prohibits an employer, the employer’s agent, representative, or designee from taking adverse employment action against an employee or applicant for employment who declines to attend, participate, or listen to communications from the employer in an employer-sponsored meeting during which the employer communicates their opinion on religious or political matters. Under the bill, “political matters” includes “the decision to join or support a political party or potential civic, community, fraternal, or labor organization.”

The legislation also enables an employee to file a written complaint with the Commissioner of Labor and Industry, if an employee believes an employer has violated the standards established in the bill. The Commissioner is authorized to investigate the complaint and attempt to resolve the matter informally through mediation. If, however, the Commissioner cannot resolve the matter through mediation, and, after an investigation the Commissioner determines the employer has violated this section they may assess civil penalties, issue orders to cease and desist from the violative conduct, and seek other remedial action. The Commissioner is authorized to file a petition in any circuit court to seek enforcement of their order.

AFSCME Maryland Council 3 represents approximately 55,000 public service workers across varying levels of government including city, county, state, and higher education. AFSCME members are on the frontlines every day delivering critical public services our communities depend on.

Across the country, states are moving to protect workers from compulsory attendance in employer-sponsored meetings, also known as “captive-audience meetings,” during which the employer communicates their political or religious opinions, including their views on unionization.<sup>1</sup> Research has shown that employers spend approximately \$400 million per year on anti-union consultants who specialize in using captive audience meetings, in addition to other tactics, to intimidate and instill fear in workers for the purpose of dissuading workers from forming a union.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Perez and Jennifer Sherer, *Will Illinois be next to tackle the problem of ‘captive audience’ meetings? Rights and freedoms of 22.7 million workers now protected in seven states*, Economic Policy Institute, April 18, 2024, <https://www.epi.org/blog/will-illinois-be-next-to-tackle-the-problem-of-captive-audience-meetings-rights-and-freedoms-of-22-7-million-workers-now-protected-in-seven-states/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

Workers employed by Centurion, a healthcare provider for incarcerated individuals, at Western Correctional Institution and North Branch Correctional Institution were subjected to employer-sponsored meetings, during which the employer and their agents expressed their negative views on unionization to workers. These employer-sponsored communications occurred in large-group settings as well as individualized, targeted meetings. During the course of workers organizing attempts to join AFSCME Council 3, the employer: i) hired a union avoidance educator to speak with every employee at the worksite during work hours; ii) sent emails and texts urging employees to vote no on unionizing; and iii) sent company executives to hold group meetings on why employees should not unionize. Despite the employer's efforts, the workers at Centurion voted to join AFSCME Council 3, however, the employer has continued to litigate the election before the NLRB, and thus, the workers have not been able to be certified and commence bargaining.

SB417 will provide workers with additional protection from employer retaliation and promote a workers' freedom to choose whether they wish to listen to an employer's opinions regarding political or religious matters. Workers should not be subjected to mandatory or compulsory communications from their employer on matters that are deeply important and personal to an individual's beliefs and feel threatened in the security of their employment if they do not attend an employer sponsored meeting on such matters.

**We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 417.**

