



Testimony - SB 417, Labor and Employment - Mandatory Meetings on Religious or
Political Matters - Employee Attendance & Participation (Maryland Worker Freedom Act)
Favorable

Senate Finance Committee

February 18, 2026

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Honorable Chairwoman Beidle & Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

SEIU Local 500 represents thousands of public service workers across Maryland, including employees in public schools, higher education, and public institutions. Our members are dedicated professionals who serve Maryland's communities every day. They deserve workplaces grounded in respect, fairness, and freedom from coercion.

SB 417 establishes a clear and commonsense principle: no worker should be required to attend or participate in employer-sponsored meetings where the employer expresses opinions on political or religious matters, under threat of discipline, discharge, or retaliation.

Workers should not have to choose between their paycheck and their personal beliefs.

This bill does not prohibit employers from expressing their views. It does not prevent voluntary meetings. It does not interfere with required workplace trainings or job-related communications. What it does is ensure that attendance and participation in meetings about political or religious viewpoints are truly voluntary.

In recent years, mandatory "captive audience" meetings have become more common in some workplaces across the country—often during union organizing efforts, ballot initiatives, or public policy debates. Employees can be required to sit through messaging about elections, legislation, public policy proposals, or labor organizations, with implicit or explicit pressure to conform. SB 417 protects workers from being compelled into those situations.

The bill strikes a careful balance. It includes appropriate exemptions for religious organizations, political organizations, educational coursework, legally required trainings, and governmental communications related to policy administration. It creates a fair enforcement process through the Commissioner of Labor and Industry, with mediation as a first step and meaningful remedies if violations occur. It also requires employers to post clear notices so workers understand their rights.

At its core, this legislation affirms a simple but powerful idea: employees are not captive audiences. They are individuals with their own political and religious beliefs. Protecting their right to decline participation in employer-sponsored messaging on those matters strengthens workplace dignity and reinforces democratic values.

Maryland has long been a leader in protecting workers' rights. SB 417 continues that tradition by ensuring that free speech and freedom of belief extend into the workplace.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 417. Thank you to Senator Lam for leading on this important issue of worker freedom.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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