



Testimony - SB 857, Labor and Employment - Civic and Related Activities - Protection
(Maryland Employee Civic Activity and Lawful Expression Protection Act)

Favorable

Senate Finance Committee

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Honorable Chairwoman Beidle & Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

At its core, SB 857 is about worker freedom—the freedom to speak, organize, participate in civic life, and engage in lawful expression without fear of retaliation from an employer. No worker should have to choose between keeping their job and exercising their fundamental rights as a member of a democratic society.

Too often, workers are silenced through subtle and overt forms of employer pressure: coercive political activity, mandatory “captive audience” meetings, retaliation for off-duty advocacy, or blacklisting based on beliefs or associations. SB 857 draws a clear and necessary line, making it unlawful for employers to punish workers for lawful political activity, civic engagement, or expression that takes place off the clock and outside the workplace.

SEIU Local 500 strongly supports the bill’s protections against employer retaliation and coercion. The right to refuse employer-favored political activity—whether donations, endorsements, or compelled speech—is essential to true free speech. Speech is not free if it is forced, and democracy is weakened when workers are pressured to conform to their employer’s political agenda.

The bill also appropriately balances employee rights with legitimate employer interests by carving out narrow, well-defined exceptions for conduct that interferes with job performance, violates confidentiality, or involves harassment or threats. Importantly, the

burden is placed on the employer to justify any claimed exemption, ensuring that worker rights are not eroded through vague or overbroad policies.

SB 857 recognizes that workers do not surrender their constitutional values at the workplace door. Protecting lawful expression, association, and civic participation strengthens—not weakens—our economy, our democracy, and our communities. When workers are free to speak and act according to their conscience, they are more engaged, more secure, and better able to advocate for themselves and others.

SEIU Local 500 urges the Committee to stand up for free speech, democratic participation, and worker dignity by issuing a favorable report on Senate Bill 857.

Thank you for your time and consideration.