

SB0922_Collective_Bargaining_-_Local_Government_Em

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Position: FAV



TESTIMONY

SB0922 Collective Bargaining – Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

Bill Sponsor: Senator Harris

Committee: Finance

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, Co-Chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0922 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists – individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

The rights of workers to organize and to bargain collectively with employers ensure that both workers and management come to the table as equals. This principle applies just as much to local government employees across Maryland. When workers have the ability to organize, they can advocate for reasonable wages, safe working conditions, and fair treatment. Without these rights, employers—public or private—too often hold all the power.

SB0922 addresses a long-standing inequity. Many local government employees perform essential public services but lack the same bargaining rights afforded to other public workers in Maryland. This bill corrects that imbalance and ensures that local employees are not left behind simply because of where they work.

Local governments, like any responsible employer, should not rely on sub-standard wages or poor working conditions to balance their budgets. Fair labor practices strengthen the workforce, reduce turnover, and improve service delivery to residents.

For these reasons, we strongly urge a **FAVORABLE** report on SB0922.

SB 922 AFSCME Council 3_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Christian Gobel

Position: FAV



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Patrick Moran – President

**SB 922 – Collective Bargaining –
Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act
Finance Committee
March 12, 2026**

FAVORABLE

AFSCME Maryland Council 3 supports Senate Bill 922. Senate Bill 922 extends collective bargaining rights to county and municipal employees across Maryland, who do not currently have the freedom to collectively bargain. Additionally, the legislation will establish a framework of consistent rights, obligations, and duties for local government employees, exclusive representatives, and employers. Under the bill, local governments will benefit from streamlined administrative representation certification procedures that would be handled by the Public Employee Relations Board.

AFSCME Maryland Council 3 represents approximately 55,000 state, county, and municipal employees across Maryland. From Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, AFSCME members are on the frontlines everyday making it possible for our communities to function. However, not all local government public employees across Maryland enjoy the freedom to choose collective bargaining.

Approximately half of the jurisdictions in Maryland have minimal or zero collective bargaining laws for county employees.¹ In addition, jurisdictions vary on whether their ordinances specify bargaining unit determinations, dispute resolution processes for bargaining, or explicitly identifying unfair labor practices, i.e., prohibited conduct by the employer and exclusive representative.

Historically, the evolution of Maryland’s public sector collective bargaining rights for public employees has been incremental, piecemeal, and has resulted in a varied patchwork of differing laws that create an uneven system of rights, duties, and obligations for public employees, exclusive representatives, and employers. Frequently, members of the General Assembly are presented with local delegation bills that would extend collective bargaining rights to certain categories of public employees in jurisdictions across Maryland. However, our state does not need to continue with this haphazard practice. Senate Bill 922 will extend freedoms to public servants, streamline administrative processes and procedures, and create a more efficient system of public sector labor relations across Maryland.

The General Assembly has bucked historical practice and enacted recent reforms that promote uniformity in public sector labor relations. In the 2023 session, the General Assembly passed, and Governor Moore signed into law, the Public Employee Relations Act.² Among other things, this legislation merged three different public sector labor relations boards into one Public Employee

¹ The counties are: Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Dorchester, Garrett, Kent, Queen Anne’s, St. Mary’s, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester.

² Chapter 114, 2023 Laws of Maryland, https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/chapters_noln/Ch_114_hb0984E.pdf.

Relations Board, consolidated various definitional terms, rights, duties, and procedures concerning public sector labor relations for state, higher education, community college, and public school employees, and enumerated unfair labor practices by public employers and exclusive representatives.³

Opponents to Senate Bill 922 may argue that this legislation imposes a “one-size-fits all” system that does not respect or acknowledge the differences and variances that may exist across jurisdictions and that local control needs to be preserved. This argument is unpersuasive and without merit because it fails to recognize the adaptability and flexibility of collective bargaining as a practice and procedure, which is supported by nearly 100 years of precedent with collective bargaining in our country.

Originally enacted in 1935, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) has governed private sector labor relations across the United States for ninety years. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has broad jurisdiction over the private sector to administer and enforce the provisions of the Act over a vast array of industries including healthcare, private educational institutions, telecommunications, aerospace, retail, warehouse, transportation, the tech industry, non-profits, restaurants, and more. Regardless of the industry, collective bargaining provides the parties the flexibility to negotiate issues and topics that are unique and important to workers and management. The adaptability and success of collective bargaining derives from the fact that laws establishing collective bargaining build a common framework for parties to operate within but leave labor and management with broad space to negotiate and resolve disputes in a peaceful manner that are suitable for their workplace.

Public sector collective bargaining is no different in this regard. Private and public sector labor laws, regardless of industry, possess common elements including: i) defining key terms; ii) establishing employee, employer, and exclusive representative rights; iii) providing the procedures for the election of the exclusive representative; iv) establishing appropriate bargaining units; v) instituting the duty to bargain in good faith; vi) establishing dispute resolution procedures and the peaceful settlement of grievances; and vii) enumerating unfair labor practices that neither management nor labor unions may commit.

Senate Bill 922 possesses the same features outlined above for local government employees, employers, and exclusive representatives. The bill establishes key terms; rights, duties, and obligations for local government employees, employers, and exclusive representatives; election procedures; and dispute resolution procedures. The bill alleviates administrative burden from local government employers by requiring the PERB to manage questions of certification and unfair labor practice charges that may arise between management and exclusive representatives. Moreover, the bill provides flexibility to local governments with an exemption opportunity from the bill’s requirements if the local government files a petition with the PERB and the PERB determines the local government’s laws comply with the law and the Public Employee Relations Act. In sum, this legislation extends collective bargaining rights to local government employees, establishes streamlined administrative processes and procedures for public sector labor relations, and provides local government employers with flexibility to opt out of the law’s requirements if they currently maintain local laws that comply with the requirements of the bill and the Public Employee Relations Act. **We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 922.**

³ *Id.*

SEIU Local 500 - Testimony in Support of SB 922 20

Uploaded by: Christopher Cano

Position: FAV



Testimony - SB 922, Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public
Employee Relations Act
Favorable
Senate Finance Committee
March 12, 2026
Christopher C. Cano, MPA
Director of Political & Legislative Affairs on behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairwoman Beidle & Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

SEIU Local 500, which represents thousands of public sector and nonprofit workers across Maryland, including early childhood educators, school support staff, college faculty, and other public servants strongly supports Senate Bill 922.

SB 922 extends collective bargaining rights to public local employees across Maryland by applying the Maryland Public Employee Relations Act to counties, municipalities, and certain quasi-governmental entities. Quite simply, this bill ensures that the workers who keep our counties and municipalities running have the same fundamental freedom of association and collective bargaining rights already afforded to many other public employees in our state.

For too long, collective bargaining protections have depended on geography. A worker's rights should not be determined by their ZIP code. SB 922 creates a consistent statewide framework while still allowing local governments to adopt compliant local labor laws that meet or exceed state standards. That balance respects local governance while ensuring a meaningful floor of rights.

Importantly, the bill establishes clear impasse procedures, including binding arbitration where appropriate. That structure promotes stability, predictability, and labor peace. When workers have a fair path to resolve disputes, services continue uninterrupted and communities benefit.

SB 922 also modernizes the authority of the Public Employee Relations Board, strengthens enforcement of unfair labor practice protections, and ensures existing bargaining relationships remain intact during implementation. These provisions create clarity, transparency, and accountability for both employees and employers.

Collective bargaining is not just about contracts. It is about dignity, retention, and the ability of public servants to advocate for safe staffing, fair wages, and quality public services. When workers have a voice, workplaces are stronger, turnover is reduced, and taxpayers ultimately benefit from a more stable and professional workforce.

SEIU Local 500 believes every public worker deserves the right to organize and bargain collectively, regardless of whether they work for the State, a county, or a municipality. SB 922 moves Maryland closer to that principle of fairness and equity.

SEIU Local 500 respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 922.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

2026.03.12 SB 922_DM Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: David Maher

Position: FAV

Testimony of David Maher
SB 922 – Collective Bargaining – Local Government Employees and Public Employees
Relations Act
Finance Committee
Support / Favorable

My firm represents AFSCME Maryland Council 3. We also represent firefighters, teachers, county and municipal employees, and many other public employees. We routinely practice before Public Employee Relations Board, as well as the National Labor Relations Board for our private sector clients.

Three years ago, the General Assembly took the important step of modernizing, reforming, and consolidating Maryland's then-fragmented state labor laws into a single common body of labor law applicable to State employees, public school employees, and higher education employees. The Public Employee Relations Act created a single, professional and expert labor board, the Public Employee Relations Board, to administer this new labor law.

However, at the county and municipal level, employees face the same patchwork of laws, rights, and procedures which PERA fixed for state, public school, and higher education employees. Public-sector employees are exempt from the National Labor Relations Act, and current Maryland law leaves collective bargaining rights, unionization rights, and all other labor rights of county or municipal employees entirely up to the individual counties and municipalities. The result is that some county employees have strong labor rights and protections, and some have no rights or protections at all. Some counties and municipalities have well-developed union recognition procedures, bargaining practices, and remedies for unfair labor practices, while some have none whatsoever.

Unfortunately, employees of the majority of Maryland counties, and the overwhelming majority of municipalities, have no labor rights or protections at all. They cannot start a union, vote to be represented by a union, bargain with their employer, or be represented in grievances by their union. Employees of these jurisdictions may be terminated for engaging in union activity, and are completely without legal protection for engaging in the sort of activities which are protected under State and federal law for state employees and private sector employees.

SB 922 would extend collective bargaining rights to these employees. It provides rights equal to those found under the National Labor Relations Act and Public Employee Relations Act, and permits a process for employees to form a union and vote for whether a union will represent them. It consolidates administration under the PERB, which has the expertise and power to enforce unfair labor practices and run elections.

SB 922 recognizes that local governments may have different needs and operations, and thus permits jurisdictions to adopt certain laws regarding the administration of collective bargaining. SB 922 creates a floor of rights and procedures, as well as the opportunity for jurisdictions to create local modifications.

The county or municipality may petition the PERB for exemptions and, if local law is determined to comport with the Act’s requirements, the local government will be exempted from portions of the law.

The following chart summarizes the effect on individual counties:

Allegany Anne Arundel Baltimore City Baltimore County Howard Montgomery Prince George’s	Currently has strong and sophisticated collective bargaining laws May qualify for exemption with no or minimal local legislation, or modification to impasse procedure One year delay to July 1, 2027 in implementation to permit county to pursue exemption
Cecil Charles Frederick Harford	Has collective bargaining laws for a limited set of employees, or collective bargaining law is substantially limited regarding scope of bargaining and rights of employees Significant local legislation required in order to qualify for exemption. Subject to floor created by SB 922 effective July 1, 2026
Calvert Caroline Carroll Dorchester Garrett Kent Queen Anne’s Somerset St. Mary’s Talbot Washington Wicomico Worcester	No or minimal existing collective bargaining laws. Employees may be disciplined or terminated for organizing a union. May craft legislation to qualify for exemption Subject to floor created by SB 922 effective July 1, 2026

SB922_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Donna Edwards

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

Affiliated with the National AFL-CIO

Donna S. Edwards
President

Samuel Epps, IV
Secretary-Treasurer

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SB 922 - Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

Senate Finance Committee

March 12, 2026

SUPPORT

Donna S. Edwards

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 922. On behalf of our 700 affiliated unions, I offer the following comments.

Collective bargaining is an important tool for workers in the fight for equity, social justice, and inclusion—it is the ultimate expression of our First Amendment rights protecting freedom of association and speech. Through forming and joining unions, employees are given a voice in improving their wages, benefits, and working conditions.

SB 922 establishes a consistent and equitable framework for collective bargaining for local government employees, employers and their representatives. This approach provides for more consistency, as currently, 12 counties comprising half the jurisdictions in Maryland (Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Dorchester, Garrett, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Worcester) do not allow collective bargaining for all county employees. Additionally, jurisdictions vary on their ordinances in regards to bargaining procedures.

The evolution of Maryland's public sector collective bargaining rights has been a patchwork of differing laws that created an uneven system of rights, duties, and obligations for public employees, exclusive representatives, and employers. This disjointed approach is time consuming and treats workers' essential rights like something they need to beg for before they can exercise them.

Public sector collective bargaining, as proposed in this bill, has similar elements to private sector collective bargaining. It establishes key terms, rights, duties, obligations for local government employees, employers and exclusive representatives, and requires processes for elections and dispute resolutions. To reduce administrative burdens, this bill also calls upon the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) to manage certification questions and



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MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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unfair labor practice charges. In addition, this bill also provides a level of flexibility for local governments to be exempt from the bill's requirements, provided that they submit a petition to the PERB and the board determines that the locality's laws comply with the Public Employee Relations Act.

SB 922 reinforces our state's commitment to equity by ensuring that county and municipal employees have the same rights and protections as their peers in the private sector and in counties where collective bargaining is already permitted.

For these reasons, we strongly urge a favorable vote on SB 922.



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SB922_MSEA_Cook_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Jessica Cook

Position: FAV

**Favorable
Senate Bill 922
Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee
Relations Act**

**Finance Committee
March 12, 2026**

**Jessica Cook
Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 922. This legislation would extend collective bargaining rights to all employees of local governments for the purpose of being represented by employee organizations in all matters relating to salaries, wages, hours, and other working conditions. This bill streamlines public sector labor relations by enabling certification elections and unfair labor practices to be addressed by the Public Employee Relations Board, rather than a patchwork of different systems at the local government level.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools and community colleges, teaching and supporting our almost 900,000 K-12 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA represents more than 44 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

For far too long, many workers in Maryland's public sector have been unable to enjoy the freedom to collectively bargain through their unions. Maryland's development of public sector collective bargaining for workers has been piecemeal, incremental, and insufficient to meet the needs of working families, especially when compared to other states' public sector collective bargaining systems.¹ Senate Bill 922 makes meaningful progress to correct this historical error, by extending collective bargaining rights to county and municipal employees, who currently do not have the freedom to collectively bargain.

¹ Maryland State Labor Boards, *Public Schools, Higher Education, State Employees*, slides 7-8 (2014) (noting the development of public sector collective bargaining for certain state employees and higher education employees developed from 1996 – 2012), retrieved from: <https://laborboards.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2014/05/Powerpoint-for-Shanghai-Delegation-Feb-2013.pdf>; See also, Jimmy Tarlau, *Many Workers in Md. Don't Have the Right to Form a Union. That Needs to Change*, Maryland Matters (May 20, 2021), <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2021/05/20/jimmy-tarlau-many-workers-in-md-dont-have-the-right-to-form-a-union-that-needs-to-change/>.



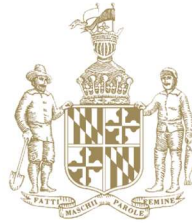
Every worker, whether they are in the private sector or the public sector, deserves a seat at the table with their employer to discuss their working conditions. The dignity of labor requires that all workers be able to enjoy the fundamental right to collectively bargain with their fellow workers. There is no rational basis to continue to deny or delay collective bargaining rights for workers. We continue to urge lawmakers to enact policies that lift up the voices of workers and recognize the dignity of labor. This legislation is a vital step towards fairness and equity.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on Senate Bill 922.

SB 992 Official Sponsor Testimony of Senator Kevin

Uploaded by: Kevin M. Harris

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Official Sponsor Testimony in Support of SB 922: Collective Bargaining – Local
Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act**
Senator Kevin M. Harris

Chair Beidle, Vice-Chair Hayes, and Members of the Finance Committee;

SB 922 extends collective bargaining rights to employees of county and municipal governments throughout our state.

As many of you may be aware, some of our public employees in county and municipal government currently do have collective bargaining rights, however, this right does not exist for all local government employees. This legislation does not mandate collective bargaining; it enables collective bargaining for all local government employees. The decision to organize and collectively bargain should rest with the employees.

Additionally, subject to certain exceptions, this legislation applies the Public Employee Relations Act to local governments. In 2023, the General Assembly made significant progress towards modernizing and streamlining our public sector collective bargaining laws by passing the Public Employee Relations Act. This legislation consolidated various public sector collective bargaining statutes for K-12, state, and higher education workers to streamline processes and procedures for labor relations. Additionally, the legislation merged three different public sector labor boards into one, the Public Employee Relations Board.

This legislation continues the trend toward streamlining and modernizing our public sector labor relations, while also providing an additional Deputy Director position for the Public Employee Relations Board to account for their expanded jurisdiction.

Finally, SB 922 grants local government jurisdictions that have existing collective bargaining laws a one year phase-in for them to seek certain exemptions from this bill.

I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 922.

Opp Letter SB922.pdf

Uploaded by: Amanda Brooks

Position: UNF



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
WASHINGTON COUNTY, MARYLAND

February 24, 2026

Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair
Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Opposition to Senate Bill 0922—Collective Bargaining – Local Government
Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

Dear Chairwoman Beidle:

The Board of County Commissioners of Washington County (the “Board”) unanimously opposes the passage of Senate Bill 0922 and its contemplated expansion of the Maryland Public Employee Relations Act to county and municipal employers and employees.

This bill constitutes a drastic and extreme disruption in local government employer and employee procedures. As the terms are defined in SB 0922, at least 90% of local government employees, including those serving on quasi-governmental entities would be affected by this bill. If all public local employees (as that term is defined in SB 0922) were permitted to enter into collective bargaining agreements (“CBAs”), myriad issues would arise that would be detrimental to both the employees and the employers. First, unionization would increase costs to the employer by requiring that additional time and energy be directed toward the negotiation of CBAs. Whereas some local governments may possess ample resources to hire labor counsel to handle these negotiations, not all local governments can afford to do so, especially when the class of eligible employees increases so dramatically.

Employers may also face more workplace tension in working with union management. Risks of strikes and potential interruptions of services can interrupt important government projects. Additionally, employers will face difficulty in promoting talented and productive workers, and similarly will face difficulty in terminating unproductive workers.

Public local employees will also suffer under this bill. Employees may feel pressure to join unions, and will consequently lose portions of their income to union dues. Employees will also lose their individual autonomy by being forced to abide by union rules, which typically favor seniority and slow the advancement and promotion of newer employees.

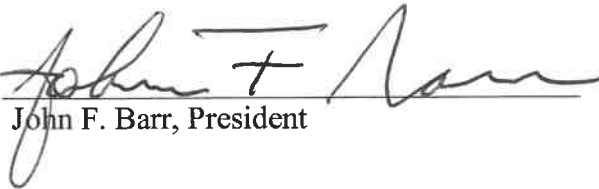
Finally, SB 0922 expands the authority and oversight of the State Public Employee Relations Board (“PERB”) to the Employee Organizations contemplated by the bill. With the increased authority and responsibility comes the need for an increased budget and staff. Moreover, centralizing authority with the PERB removes the local responsiveness and control over labor and employment matters.

100 West Washington Street, Suite 1101 | Hagerstown, MD 21740 | P: 240.313.2200 | F: 240.313.2201 | TDD: 711

For these reasons, the Board respectfully requests the Committee decline to issue a favorable report on SB 0922.

Sincerely,

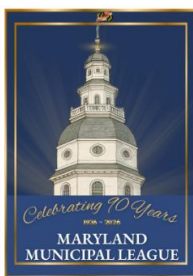
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, MARYLAND

By: 
John F. Barr, President

SB 922 - MML - UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Bill Jorch

Position: UNF



TESTIMONY

COMMITTEE: Senate Finance

DATE: March 12, 2026

POSITION: Unfavorable

BILL: SB 922

The Maryland Municipal League (MML) opposes Senate Bill 922 - Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act.

Currently about 15 municipal governments allow some employees to collectively bargain but the employer has discretion to craft the parameters around the collective bargaining process. For instance, the municipal government may select the category of employee eligible (ex. police, fire, public works, trades), which aspects of a compensation package may be collectively bargained, and whether there is binding arbitration. This flexibility is critical as it allows the local government to determine the impact on its workforce and governmental operations.

While SB 922 does not mandate that local government employees collectively bargain, it does provide the opportunity to all 32,000 municipal employees while currently it is provided at the employer's choice. Not all employees will take advantage of this new option, but many will. Any increase in the number of employees that collectively bargain will result in increased costs to that government as employees who collectively bargain typically see higher salaries and benefits. Some municipal governments are better situated to absorb such a cost increase while others are not.

Additionally, there will be a significant additional administrative burden should all municipal employees choose to collectively bargain. Municipal governments are somewhat unique as employers in that they have employees engage in distinct categories of work. This would result in municipal governments negotiating separately with several unions and then managing several unique and nuanced contracts, one for each category of employees. Municipal governments that negotiate and manage multiple contracts will have increased administrative requirements and potentially stiff penalties for non-compliance with those contracts.

For these reasons, the League respectfully requests the committee provide SB 922 with an unfavorable report.

For more information relating to this piece of testimony, please contact:

Bill Jorch: Managing Director, Advocacy and Public Policy, billj@mdmunicipal.org

Municipalities in Maryland employ 32,000 workers and provide \$5.2 billion in employee compensation.

SB0922-FIN_MACo_OPP.pdf

Uploaded by: Karrington Anderson

Position: UNF



Senate Bill 922

Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Finance Committee

Date: March 12, 2026

From: Karrington Anderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 922. This bill mandates collective bargaining rights for local government employees statewide and significantly alters local government labor relations.

Currently, counties manage labor relations through locally determined policies that reflect the unique needs of their workforce and financial constraints. SB 922 removes this discretion by requiring all counties, large and small, to engage through a State-mandated collective bargaining framework. The financial impact of SB 922 on counties would be substantial. Without dedicated state funding, counties will be forced to absorb significant costs associated with labor negotiations and contract implementation.

SB 922 permits local governments to petition to become “exempt local governments,” allowing them to adopt local laws governing bargaining unit composition, negotiation timelines, and impasse procedures. On its face, this appears to preserve local autonomy. However, the bill requires that any exempt jurisdiction must adopt impasse procedures that either authorize public employee strikes upon declaration of impasse or impose binding arbitration.

Counties are therefore, under this bill, forced to choose between strike exposure and the loss of final fiscal decision-making authority to a third-party arbitrator. This framework presents a significant concern for local governments. The inclusion of binding arbitration as the final decision-making mechanism removes incentives for collaborative negotiations and could lead to protracted disputes. Authorizing certain public employees to strike poses a significant risk to essential public services, particularly public safety and emergency response operations.

Many counties already have collective bargaining structures in place that have been developed through decades of negotiation. This bill fails to account for these long-standing agreements. MACo supports fair and competitive employment policies, which Maryland jurisdictions have pursued through the years both locally and through State-level authorizing legislation. SB 922 represents an overreach of State authority, and a rigid and unwelcome unfunded mandate that could have serious financial and operational consequences for local governments. MACo urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report on SB 922.

SB0922-FIN-OPP.pdf

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: UNF



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

SB0922

March 12, 2026

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of the Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 922: Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) respectfully **opposes** Senate Bill (SB) 922 which would expand collective bargaining requirements for local government employees under the Maryland Public Employee Relations Act.

Baltimore values the contributions of its public workforce and has a long history of working collaboratively with employee organizations. The City currently negotiates collective bargaining agreements with several unions representing thousands of municipal employees. These agreements are the result of good-faith negotiations that balance fair compensation for workers with the City's obligation to maintain fiscal stability and deliver essential services to residents.

However, the City has several significant concerns regarding the provisions of this legislation.

State Mandate Limits Local Flexibility

SB 922 would establish a uniform statewide framework governing collective bargaining for county and municipal employees. While well-intentioned, this approach does not reflect the wide variation in fiscal capacity, workforce composition, and service delivery responsibilities among Maryland's local governments.

Baltimore faces unique fiscal pressures and operational challenges with a limited tax base when compared to other larger counties in the State. A one-size-fits-all statewide mandate would limit the City's ability to design labor relations structures that reflect its local budget realities and workforce needs.

In recent years the City's budget has absorbed the impact of shifting State costs to local jurisdictions. From teacher pension costs to updating the cost-share structure for SDAT, these growing requirements limit flexibility in the City's budget. Since Fiscal 2017 fixed costs budgets have grown 17%. This growth crowds out the City's ability to fund the services which are most important to our residents.

Binding Arbitration Increases Costs and Delays Negotiations

The presence of binding arbitration can significantly alter the dynamics of collective bargaining. When arbitration becomes a likely outcome, negotiations can become more prolonged and adversarial. Parties may delay compromise in anticipation that an arbitrator will ultimately decide key issues. This dynamic often results in longer negotiation timelines and higher overall labor costs, as the threat of arbitration shifts leverage during contract discussions. We've seen this play out firsthand as we have worked through contract negotiations with our public safety unions (since Fiscal 2023 arbitration has been initiated seven times during Police and Fire negotiations).

Additionally, arbitration decisions can impose financial obligations that exceed locally available resources. Because arbitrators are not responsible for managing municipal budgets or balancing competing service demands, these outcomes can create fiscal commitments that local governments may struggle to sustain.

Personnel Costs Already Dominate the City's Budget

Personnel expenses already represent the largest share of Baltimore's operating budget – estimated at 45% of the total operating budget in Fiscal 2027. As a result, even modest increases in wages or benefits can have a significant impact on the City's structural fiscal balance.

Rising personnel costs will constrain the City's ability to make strategic investments in staffing and services. In December 2025 the City released its updated 10-Year Financial Plan that focuses on strategic investments in the City's budget while providing property tax relief to residents. Mandated growth in wages will significantly impact our ability to make key investments envisioned in the plan, including:

- Significant investment in infrastructure by growing local investment in the capital budget
- Eradicating vacant properties in the City
- Providing tax relief to residents
- Improving core City services

While identifying these investments, the 10-Year Plan also prioritizes competitive wages for City employees. The City is already making progress towards this goal by implementing the recommendations of a salary study for our lowest paid employees.

Conclusion

The City of Baltimore strongly supports its workforce and remains committed to fair and productive labor relations. However, SB 922 would significantly reduce local flexibility, increase fiscal risk, and complicate the City's ability to manage its workforce responsibly within available resources.

For these reasons, the City respectfully requests an **unfavorable** report on SB 922.

Thank you for your consideration.

SB922_UNFAV_HCGCassilly.pdf

Uploaded by: Robert Cassilly

Position: UNF

ROBERT G. CASSILLY
Harford County Executive



ROBERT S. McCORD
Director of Administration

March 10, 2026

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Opposition to Senate Bill 922 – Collective Bargaining – Local Government Employees and
Public Employee Relations Act

Dear Chairwoman Beidle and Committee Members,

On behalf of the citizens of Harford County, I respectfully submit this letter in opposition to Senate Bill 922.

SB 922 would significantly alter the relationship between local governments and their employees by mandating that counties and municipalities operate under a statewide collective bargaining framework. While labor-management relationships are an important component of public service delivery, this legislation represents a substantial state intrusion into matters that have historically been governed locally.

Local governments operate under diverse charters, fiscal structures, and workforce needs. Harford County, like many jurisdictions, has established personnel systems, compensation structures, and administrative procedures that reflect local priorities and budgetary realities. SB 922 would replace that flexibility with a statewide system, including prescribed bargaining procedures and potential binding arbitration mechanisms, regardless of local governance structure or fiscal condition.

One of the most significant concerns is the fiscal impact. Mandatory collective bargaining and binding impasse procedures could result in financial obligations that extend beyond available revenues or long-term fiscal planning. Counties are required by law to adopt balanced budgets. Any statutory framework that shifts financial decision-making authority or compels expenditures through arbitration risks undermining local budget discipline and taxpayer accountability.

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Senate Bill 922 Opposition Letter
March 10, 2026
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Additionally, the bill diminishes the authority of locally elected officials to manage the workforce in a manner consistent with community needs. Decisions related to staffing levels, compensation, benefits, and workplace policies must remain within the discretion of those directly accountable to local voters. A one-size-fits-all state mandate does not account for differences in population size, service delivery models, or fiscal capacity among Maryland's counties.

Harford County supports constructive engagement with its employees and recognizes the value of open communication and fair workplace policies. However, imposing a mandatory statewide collective bargaining regime removes essential local discretion and may create long-term fiscal and operational constraints.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 922.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Cassilly", is written over the typed name. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Robert G. Cassilly