

HB 1492 Written Testimony

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It is my sincere belief that this committee will pass HB1492 to give teachers and library workers the right to strike. The right to strike is fundamental for all workers, particularly those in unionized fields, but Maryland public sector workers, including teachers and librarians, give up this right because they are public sector workers, despite this right being available for these workers in other states. Our support for this does not mean we intend to strike or will do so any time soon, but having the right to strike gives another tool to bargain with, another tool by which to make the working conditions better for employees and services better for patrons and students. Teachers and library workers do not enter these careers for any other reason than they love what they do, and any requests for change are to provide the best service and best education we can.

When teachers strike, the benefits help everyone. Past strikes, from unions in Chicago, Portland, LA, and Oakland, among others, show that the demands and requests by the workers are only to create an increased quality of life for all. Some of the results from these strikes and from these unions include: class size reduction, thereby creating a better learning environment for everyone, a guaranteed nurse in every school, a guaranteed librarian in every school, additional planning, and, in almost every case, increased support and assistance for special education teachers. Regarding concerns over what will happen to students during a strike, communities can, and have, come together to support everyone, educators and students. In LA, city officials helped set up meal distribution and childcare when the teachers were on strike. Parents can join organizing efforts to assist in childcare or food relief as well. And in districts where teachers have gone on strike, student learning outcomes have improved. These are just some examples of how to support our workers and communities during a strike.

For library workers, we've seen, recently, attacks on several of our local systems. Last November, 14 Baltimore County Public Library employees were laid off with no notice, for no reason, in a move so unpopular they were reinstated in two days, and over the next two weeks the head of Human Resources and the CEO of the library stepped down. In Howard County last month, over 55 employees of the Howard County Library system were summarily laid off, again with no notice, and were reinstated when the County Executive, Calvin Ball, managed to find the money to cover their salaries. To which I ask, why wasn't this money approved in the first place, if it was so simple to find. Given the right to strike, library workers would not have to depend on the kindness of strangers to right wrongs. In

both of these cases, the firings were unfair, shortsighted, and made little or no sense. They created a perfect opportunity for us to expand our community outreach and show united support between library systems, but a the opportunity to strike would have prevented these issues entirely. We would've been able to, from the beginning, discuss these matters with library leadership and reach a consensus that not only retained on the affected parties, but, for better and worse, let the CEO and head of HR save face and keep their positions as well.

Again, to reiterate, this does not mean we will strike, but it gives us more bargaining power and helps us to create better services for all. When our public institutions can better serve our people, everyone benefits.