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HB 831 - Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

House Government, Labor, and Elections

March 3, 2026

SUPPORT

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Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 831. 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.

HB 831 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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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.

HB 831 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 HB 831.



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