

My name is Juli Ohanian, please know that I would be there in person to testify in support of House Bill 1492 were I not at the end of my third trimester!

I am a high school English teacher in Baltimore City, a leader of Greater Baltimore Democratic Socialists of America and our Maryland Right to Strike coalition, and a member of Baltimore Teachers Union.

Friends, neighbors, and colleagues and I first started this campaign because we saw the ways in which the promise of a fair and equal public education wasn't happening, despite all of the extra hours, all the "going the extra mile" we did as educators.

We saw the ways our public services were being dismantled left and right, on top of decades-long austerity and underfunding, as the Kirwan commission documented in clear, stark terms. Although this trend has greatly accelerated in the last year, it's one we public servants have struggled under for far too long.

Those of us who serve the public do so because we believe so strongly in what we do that we "make it work" under impossible circumstances. We teachers continue to teach the skills, and love, of writing, of reading, of problem-solving, of critical thinking even when our students carry with them miles-wide gaps left gaping from what can only be called institutional neglect. Our classrooms burst at the seams, our kids lack for foundational reading skills and fluency, and kids who need more support are left to fend for themselves. Instead of providing the skilled support staff and ratios that we know our kids need to get out of this crisis, we pass them off to over-extended classroom teachers to handle alone, with rosters of 150, 175 or more students. No one is getting what they need.

We public servants are the best guardians of the public good that we have. And when we can't strike, we can't secure the working conditions that best enable us to do what we love most: to serve the public, to make sure everyone is taken care of, that the least of us have what we need to survive, to transcend our humble beginnings, to flourish.

I urge you to grant what shouldn't have to even be a question. I urge you to vote yes on House Bill 1492, granting public school employees and library workers the right to strike. To strike and fight for the quality of life of every single person who walks through our doors each day. What do you stand for if not for this?