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SUPPORT HB1492: Collective Bargaining - Public Employees - Revocation of Certification and School and Library Employees' Right to Strike

As educators, we advocate not just for ourselves but for our students. Improved working conditions for educators means improved learning conditions for students. Beyond improved pay which helps recruit and retain educators to reduce vacancies, educators also often advocate for reductions in workload and increases in staffing. These are essential to improving students' learning experiences. Fully staffed schools provide students with a positive learning environment, allow them to build long-term relationships with dedicated staff, and give them the support and resources they deserve. It is clear that educators who have reduced class sizes, caseloads, and workloads are better able to meet students' individualized needs to ensure each one is able to reach their full potential.

While there are currently many ways to advocate for better working and learning conditions, that does not mean that educators' demands are always met. Striking--which is always the last resort for workers--is a powerful tool that should be available to public sector workers just as it is for those in the private sector. We have seen the power of strikes in recent months as nurses in New York and California have fought to ensure their hospital systems are able to meet the needs of their patients.

No one strikes on a whim. It is a last resort when all else is tried. For unions, becoming strike-ready takes a great deal of effort and is not without risk; however, this last step is taken when management refuses to listen. The power of the strike leads to workers' demands finally being taken seriously. Often, just the strike vote is enough. At the start of this school year, some of the Anne Arundel County Public Schools privately contracted bus drivers took a strike vote. That vote alone was enough to get them back to the bargaining table so that their demands for better health care were met. Not only does every person deserve high-quality health care, better bus driver health care leads to safer driving which better protects students.

Often you will hear that educators going on strike harms students. No one wants students to miss a day of school; however, educators know that it is actually chronically underfunded and understaffed schools that result in long-term harm to students. Even more, we know that public education and public libraries are the cornerstone of strong communities. This is why educators and librarians are able to rally the community to support their bargaining demands. We saw this in Los Angeles when educators went on strike in 2019. United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) had 34,000 members but they almost doubled their numbers with 60,000 people rallying in support of their demands. Why did tens of thousands of community members join them during their strike? Because UTLA was bargaining and striking for the common good including for green spaces for students to play as well as for support for immigrant families. They also were fighting to ensure that every school had a nurse, every secondary school had a librarian, and that more school counselors were hired to bring down counselor-to-student ratios.

This is why I urge a favorable report for HB1492. When public school educators and public librarians have the legal right to strike, we will have a more powerful tool in our toolbox to fight for the common good, giving us the ability to more successfully advocate for the communities we serve to ensure they have the resources they deserve.

Respectfully submitted,
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President