



Testimony in Support of HB0045

**Labor and Employment – Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters –
Employee Attendance and Participation**

(Maryland Worker Freedom Act)

February 17, 2026

To: Honorable Chair Melissa Wells, Vice Chair Kenneth Kerr, and members of the House

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

From: Kayla Mock, Political & Legislative Director

United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 400

Chair Wells and members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee, I appreciate the chance to share my testimony on behalf of our over 10,000 members in Maryland, working in grocery, retail, food distribution, cannabis, and health care. Through collective bargaining, our members raise the workplace standards of wages, benefits, safety, and retirement for all workers. Union members are critical to addressing inequality and uplifting the middle class.

We strongly support HB0045 and urge you to vote it favorably.

According to an Economic Policy Institute article from December 2024 titled “Tackling the Problem of Captive Audience Meetings: How States are Stepping Up to Protect Workers Rights and Freedoms,” “political and religious coercion in the workplace is a growing problem affecting workers from all backgrounds and across the political spectrum. U.S. employers have significant control over employee conduct under current federal laws. For example, employers can require workers to attend “captive audience” meetings and force them to listen to political, religious, or anti-union views from employers during *work time*.

Legislatures in 18 states have advanced anti-mandatory captive audience laws to ensure that workers retain the freedom to choose whether to attend political and religious meetings on the job site, and six states have enacted such laws.

A few things to note:

1. This does not ban employers from holding such meetings. An employer may still hold a meeting for employees on political and religious topics.
2. It gives the worker the right to say no to attending these meetings. In states without anti-mandatory-captive-audience laws, workers are required to listen to political and religious rhetoric without the option to decline.
3. All workers without a contract are at-will employees, meaning they can be fired at any time, for any reason. Workers fear retaliation, discipline, or even termination if they refuse to attend a captive-audience meeting.
4. The National Labor Relations Board recently issued a ruling banning captive audience meetings, citing forcing employees to attend these meetings under threat of discharge or discipline as interfering with an employee's free and fair right to organize or join a union, due to the meetings tending to coerce or intimidate employees against organizing. However, the Board made clear that an employer may lawfully hold meetings with workers to express their views on unionization so long as workers are provided reasonable advance notice of the subject of any such meeting, that attendance is voluntary with no adverse consequences for failure to attend, and that no attendance records of the meeting will be kept.
5. However, as we have already witnessed, the new Administration has indicated rolling back many of the protections for workers that have been enacted. They are systematically undermining the National Labor Relations Board and the power it has to enforce the free and fair choices for workers organizing or joining a union.

We appreciate Maryland's commitment to protecting its most vulnerable citizens. We believe those protections should be extended to workers to ensure they can exercise their freedoms in the workplace.

For all of these reasons and more, we urge a favorable report on HB0045.