

Library Workers Empowerment Act (HB 609 / SB 591)

SUMMARY: Public library workers across Maryland are unable to exercise their Constitutional right to form a union and collectively bargain unless the Maryland General Assembly passes enabling legislation. In the past, this process has been handled on a county-by-county basis, requiring the state legislature to repeatedly contemplate similar legislation. Passing statewide enabling legislation will eliminate this redundancy and allow library workers a clear and consistent process to exercise their Constitutional rights, if they so choose.

WHAT'S THE STATUS OF THIS LEGISLATION? This bipartisan legislation is being sponsored by Delegate Jared Solomon as bill HB 609 and is crossfiled by Senator Lam in the Senate as SB 591.

WHAT DOES THIS LEGISLATION DO? When passed, the Library Workers Empowerment Act (LWEP) will provide a consistent process for employees of unorganized public library systems in Maryland to form a union and to collectively bargain, if they so choose.

WHY ARE SOME PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEMS EXCLUDED FROM THE LEGISLATION? The excluded systems are Montgomery County, Prince George's County and Baltimore County. The employees of these library systems have already navigated a process to form a union, primarily by having already gone through the legislative process. The purpose of *this* legislation is to provide a process to other library system employees who may wish to do the same.

DOES THIS BILL FORCE LIBRARY SYSTEMS TO BECOME UNION? No. This legislation seeks to efficiently provide currently unorganized workers the necessary steps to show interest for a vote to have union representation, should they wish to do so.

WILL WORKERS BE REQUIRED TO PAY DUES IF THEIR SYSTEM HAS A SUCCESSFUL UNION ELECTION? No. County library workers fall within the public-sector labor industry. The 2018 Supreme Court *Janus* decision determined that public sector employees cannot be compelled to pay union dues as a condition of employment; therefore, only library workers who wish to be a union member will be asked to pay dues.

WHY IS THIS A GOOD AND WORKABLE BILL? The language in this bill follows common election and collective bargaining practices for public sector workers across the state. There has been a deliberate attempt to strike a balance between existing county cultures and budgetary processes with library workers wanting to exercise their right to form a union and collectively bargain.

THE GOAL: Since the passing of Baltimore County's library employee collective bargaining law in 2021, library workers across the state have inquired about undergoing the same process for their library system. Often, workers are disheartened when they learn about the legislative process. Workers know that attempting a union organizing campaign is difficult enough; adding an additional legislative hurdle makes exercising their rights seem impossible. In addition, many feel advocating for a collective bargaining bill will make them vulnerable in the workplace. Labor's goal is to help these workers, prevent county-by-county redundancies, while respecting individual county library system employees to choose if they want to have a union.

Government is intended to protect access to citizen's rights, not obstruct. Supporting this bill will provide a process for public library workers who want to attempt to form a union, while placing no requirement for those who do not.

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