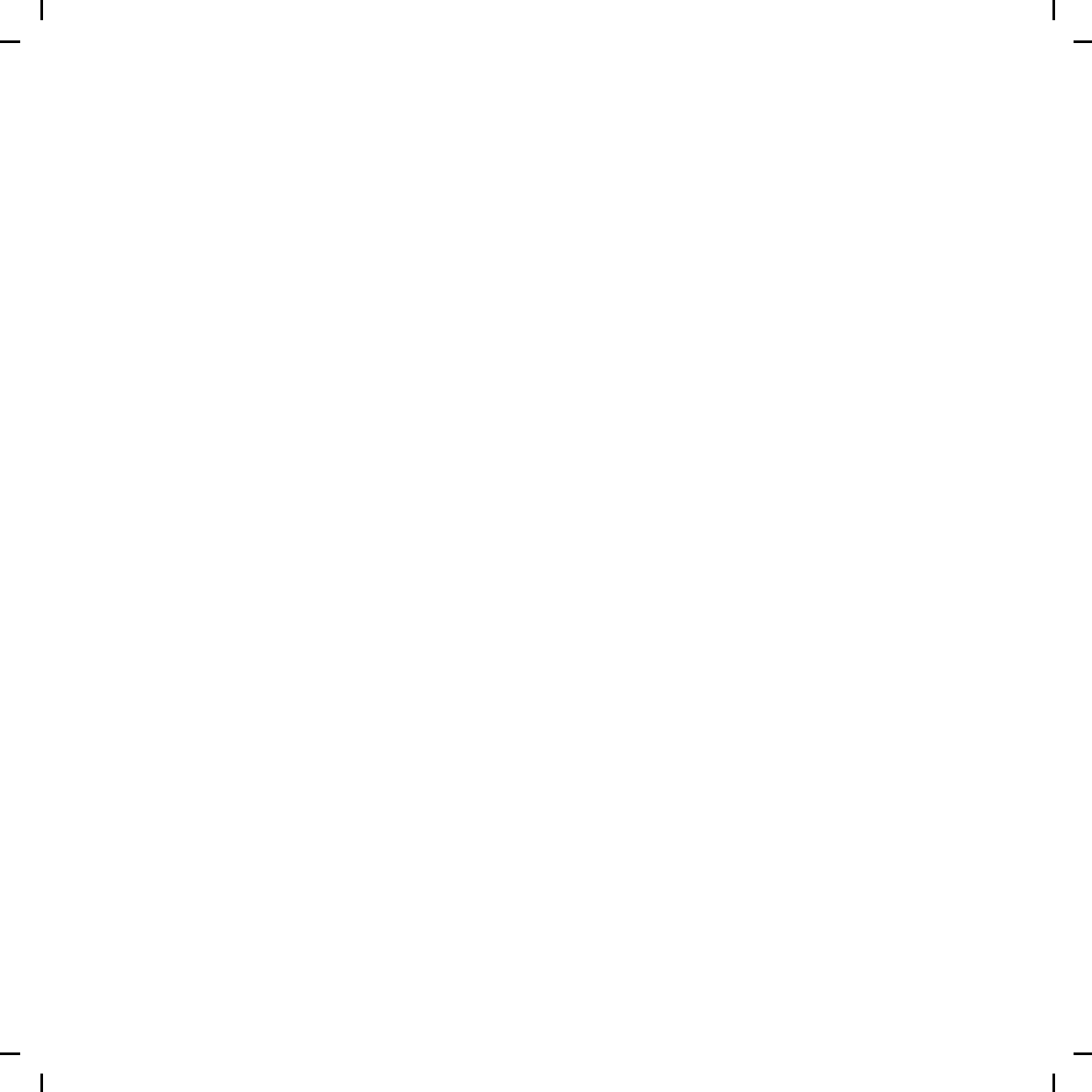


What is the

# LIBRARY WORKERS EMPOWERMENT ACT

What does it mean for my library system?





## *Greetings*

If you are a public library employee in the state of Maryland, chances are the *Library Workers Empowerment Act* enables you to exercise rights you couldn't before the 2024 Maryland legislative session.

The rights to which we are referring are forming a union and collectively bargaining with your employer. Because we are not employed by the state or county governments, we could not avail ourselves of the processes outlined in state or county laws. Since we are not private sector workers, we couldn't follow the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Basically, the US Constitution protected our right to unionize, if we choose to do so, but there was no law that provided a process, until now.

The *Library Workers Empowerment Act* (LWEA) is a piece of legislation that was passed by the Maryland General Assembly with bipartisan support. It does not require the employees from any library system to become union. However, if you and your coworkers decide that you want a voice at work and the ability to negotiate your wages, hours, and working conditions, the LWEA outlines the steps to follow.

The LWEA is the result of a lot of hard work over multiple legislative sessions. There were some challenges, but knowing how library employees love our jobs and only want to make our systems better, we couldn't give up.

Following is our story and more information on the LWEA.

*Sincerely,*

**MARYLAND LIBRARY WORKERS UNITED**

## LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Maryland has 23 counties with public library systems, as well as one public library system in Baltimore City. In 1935, the Office of Public Libraries was formed under the State Board of Education. Today, they fall under the Maryland State Library Agency.

Even though the individual systems are part of county public services, they are governed by the state and state law. Below is a timeline of some previous actions around library collective bargaining:

- In the early 1980's, Montgomery County Public Library employees contemplated forming a union. The necessary steps to change the county's charter were taken so the staff could follow county procedures. This has since been deemed unadvisable by the Maryland Attorney General.
- In 1986, legislation was passed enabling staff at Prince George's County Public Library to unionize and collectively bargain.
- In 2013, legislation was passed enabling Howard County Public Library workers to unionize. This law was thought unfavorable to many employees. For a decade, workers did not seek to unionize under this legislation.
- In 2021, Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL) employees worked with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) to pass legislation in one general session. This law received a lot of attention and sparked interest in many other library systems.



## Who We Are

On the heels of BCPL's success, other library systems began contemplating unionizing. However, when systems in non union-friendly counties faced opposition, it became clear that a county-by-county approach wasn't going to work. That realization was the genesis of Maryland Library Workers United (MLWU). Here's a little of that story:

- In 2021, workers in Enoch Pratt Free Library (EPFL) worked to form a union. A city library, they were able to file for a union representation election by agreement with the City Council.
- In November 2022, EPFL won their election. The process under which they unionized didn't impose a timeline for bargaining. As of the 2024 legislative session, they had not reached an agreement with their employer.
- In 2022, Harford County Public Library (HCPL) workers pulled together with the IAM to try to replicate BCPL's success. Their local bill was amended to be a statewide bill, but failed to pass into law.
- In 2023, HCPL made another attempt at passing a statewide bill. They had the help of BCPL workers, EPFL and others, working as MLWU. This bill overwhelmingly passed in the House, but stalled in the Senate.
- In 2023, Howard County Public Library staff (HoCPL) and Anne Arundel Public Library (AACPL) staff collected enough interest to file for an election. HoCPL was able to conduct an election under their 2013 law, but AACPL had no means to file for an election.
- In 2024, MLWU, with the assistance of Maryland's labor organizations and bill sponsors saw LWEA pass into law and signed by Governor Wes Moore on April 25, 2024.

Today, MLWU continues to support library employees across Maryland. We listen, we encourage, we empathize; and if you want to become union, we help with that too!

# The Library Workers Empowerment Act

The LWEA applies to county public library systems that were not unionized prior to 2024. It also amends portions of the Howard County library law passed in 2013, as that bill didn't include part-time workers among other short-comings. The LWEA also includes Baltimore City's Enoch Pratt Free Library. Their process didn't include the measures to prohibit dragging out the negotiation process. Being covered by this new law will help EPFL move forward in contract negotiations.

For unorganized county library systems, the LWEA provides the following:

- The right to form a union to collectively bargain with your employer without fear of intimidation or retaliation.
- The ability to file for a union election with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) if 30% of the employees express an interest in having a union by submitting a union authorization card (A-card).
- The ability to have your union recognized if a majority of the staff submit A-cards.
- The right to keep your support of a union confidential. Union authorization card (A-card) knowing your employer will NOT receive copies of your card or your name on a list.
- The right to representation and to bargain with your employer when your election is successful.
- Timelines to limit dragging out negotiations to ensure optimum opportunity for contracts to adhere to county budgetary processes.

For county public library systems whose employees do not want to form a union, there is no obligation to do anything. Your workplace will not change. If in the future you change your mind, the LWEA will guide your process and MLWU will be there to help.

## What Does It Mean to be Union?

A union is a group of workers who come together with a collective voice to improve the wages, hours, and working conditions of the bargaining unit.

Unions are membership driven organizations with the goal of negotiating a legally binding agreement between the employees and the employer. Unions provide representation when it's needed, to ensure employee rights are respected and administrative processes are conducted fairly.

The employees are the union. You know the work, so the negotiating goals are determined by the priorities you express in bargaining surveys. Employees assist at the negotiating table and will ensure the contract is followed during the day-to-day workplace activities.

External union representatives assist with bargaining, train members to be officers and stewards, as well as guide you through out-of-the ordinary situations. Members, those who voluntarily pay dues each month, will be the stewards, can hold office and make decisions through their vote.

There is more power in unity, which is why the strongest unions have the highest amount of bargaining unit participation.

### Solidarity Matters



A single stick  
will snap



A bundle is hard to break

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**Senator Clarence Lam, D-12**

**The International Association of Machinists  
and Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO**

**IAM-BCPL Local 4538**

**MD/DC AFL-CIO**

**If you want to learn more about forming a union in your library system, or have questions about the LWEA, please contact us:  
[mdlworkersunited@gmail.com](mailto:mdlworkersunited@gmail.com)**

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