



House Bill 831

Collective Bargaining - Local Government Employees and Public Employee Relations Act

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Government, Labor, and Elections
Committee

Date: March 3, 2026

From: Karrington Anderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 831. This bill mandates collective bargaining rights for local government employees statewide and significantly alters local government labor relations.

Currently, counties manage labor relations through locally determined policies that reflect the unique needs of their workforce and financial constraints. HB 831 removes this discretion by requiring all counties, large and small, to engage through a State-mandated collective bargaining framework. The financial impact of HB 831 on counties would be substantial. Without dedicated state funding, counties will be forced to absorb significant costs associated with labor negotiations and contract implementation.

HB 831 permits local governments to petition to become “exempt local governments,” allowing them to adopt local laws governing bargaining unit composition, negotiation timelines, and impasse procedures. On its face, this appears to preserve local autonomy. However, the bill requires that any exempt jurisdiction must adopt impasse procedures that either authorize public employee strikes upon declaration of impasse or impose binding arbitration.

Counties are therefore, under this bill, forced to choose between strike exposure and the loss of final fiscal decision-making authority to a third-party arbitrator. This framework presents a significant concern for local governments. The inclusion of binding arbitration as the final decision-making mechanism removes incentives for collaborative negotiations and could lead to protracted disputes. Authorizing certain public employees to strike poses a significant risk to essential public services, particularly public safety and emergency response operations.

Many counties already have collective bargaining structures in place that have been developed through decades of negotiation. This bill fails to account for these long-standing agreements. MACo supports fair and competitive employment policies, which Maryland jurisdictions have pursued through the years both locally and through State-level authorizing legislation. HB 831 represents an overreach of State authority, and a rigid and unwelcome unfunded mandate that could have serious financial and operational consequences for local governments. MACo urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 831.