

TESTIMONY OF JOSLYN N. WILLIAMS,
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ON HB131: CESAR CHAVEZ DAY
BEFORE THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Chairman Hammen, and members of the Committee. My name is Joslyn N Williams and I am the president of the Metropolitan Washington Labor Council, AFL-CIO. I am here today to proudly offer testimony in support of HB 131: Cesar Chavez Day. I would also like to thank Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher for introducing the bill and all those Delegates who sponsored the Bill.

The Metropolitan Washington Labor Council, AFL-CIO is made up of 178 unions representing 150,000 working men and women, 100,000 of those members live in Maryland.

I believe that is appropriate for the state of Maryland to set aside an official day to honor this simple and humble American who showed us yet again that everyday people uniting with other everyday people can accomplish extraordinary things together.

Cesar Estrada Chavez was born on March 31st, 1927 near Yuma, Arizona and died not far from there on April 23, 1993 at the age of 66. He is best known for his work as the founder and leader of the United Farm Workers Union in California, which brought dignity and respect to thousands of migrant farm workers. Cesar Chavez was a trade unionist in the highest tradition of our calling. Like A. Philip Randolph, who organized African-American Pullman Car workers and thereby gave them a voice that was heard around the world, Cesar Chavez against all odds organized Mexican and Mexican-American farm workers into a union that gave them a voice which is still heard today in every urban and rural community in this country.

Why have a Cesar Chavez Day in Maryland? Because his story is not unique to California and is not just a Latino story. Cesar Chavez' life and work is an American story, and a Maryland story. Using non-violent tactics, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez fought for the basic dignity of **all** Americans. Also, Cesar Chavez is remembered as an

American hero who transcended boundaries of race and social class by standing up for low-paid and often abused farm workers. Cesar Chavez supported and helped to create groundbreaking labor protections that we often take for granted but were unfortunately rare at the time. Although HB 131 would not require a paid holiday on his birthday, that day could be used to educate our children about the important role of trade unions in the state of Maryland, around the country and the world as well as recognizing the contributions Latino/Americans have made in making our country a more perfect union. Finally, Cesar Chavez stands as a positive role model for the growing Latino community in Maryland and young people of color. We all need heroes of color that we admire and whose examples we can follow.

For all these reasons I believe that HB 131 Cesar Chavez Day should receive a favorable report. Thank you Mr. Chairman.