TESTIMONY OF JOSLYN N. WILLIAMS
ON SB 660, RIGHT TO WORK
BEFORE THE
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Honorable Senator Middleton, Chairman
3 March 2011

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Joslyn N. Williams and I join my colleagues here as the President of the Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO, which is made up of 175 local unions representing 150,000 are working men and women, a majority of whom are Maryland residents.

I am here to testify most strongly against Senate Bill 660, the Right to Work bill.

Here are the reasons organized labor opposes these bills in every state into which they are introduced as identified by the national AFL-CIO and verified by statistics from the Department of Labor and its Bureau of Labor Statistics:

Right to work laws lower wages for everyone. The average worker in a right to work state makes about $5,333 a year less than workers in other states ($35,500 compared with $30,167). Weekly wages are $72 greater in free-bargaining states than in right to work states ($621 versus $549). Working families in states without right to work laws have higher wages and benefit from healthier tax bases that improve their quality of life.

Women and workers of color are particularly hurt by right-to-work laws. Women in right to work states earn $149 per week less than women in non right to work states. African American workers earn 30% less each week in right to work states and Latino workers earn 45%, approximately $180, less per week in right to work states.

Federal law already protects workers who don't want to join a union to get or keep their jobs. Supporters claim right to work laws protect employees from being forced to join unions. Don't be fooled—federal law already does this, as well as protecting nonmembers from paying for union activities that violate their religious or political beliefs. This individual freedom argument is a sham.

Right to work endangers safety and health standards that protect workers on the job by weakening unions that help to ensure worker safety by fighting for tougher safety rules. According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the rate of workplace deaths is 51 percent higher in states with right to work, where unions can't speak up on behalf of workers.

Right to work laws just aren't fair to dues-paying members. If a nonunion worker is fired illegally, the union must use its time and money to defend him or her, even if that requires going through a costly legal process. Everyone benefits, so all should share in the process. Nonmembers can even sue the union if they think it has not represented them well enough.

But perhaps the biggest argument against right to work bills are that **they are a violation of basic human rights**. Back in 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlining their beliefs and commitment to work for "the promotion of universal respect for and observance of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms". The American delegation, lead by Eleanor Roosevelt, was instrumental in drafting and pushing for the passage of this historic declaration and was one of the first signatories of this document on behalf of the United State of America. Article 23,

Section (4) of that document states and I quote "Everyone has the right to form and join a trade union for the protection of his interest".   Of course today we would say for the protection of "his or her interest".

Almost 63 years ago, this country signed on to a document that affirms that workers have rights and that these must be respected and protected. SB 660 is an affront to this document, to the concept of free association and free and open collective bargaining, and to workers themselves

Today we should be passing legislation that improves the economic lives of Maryland's workers and boosting their standard of living rather than spending our time fighting a bill that will turn dignified collective bargaining into collective begging and cause economic backsliding for Maryland residents.

Please vote this bill down once again.