



Kenya Campbell
PRESIDENT

LaBrina Hopkins
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Good afternoon Chair Schleifer, Vice Chair Glover, Council President Cohen, and members of the Legislative Investigations Committee. My name is Todd Reynolds, and I am the Political Coordinator for the AFT-Maryland, the state federation for City Union of Baltimore, AFT-Local 800, the certified union for thousands of city employees employed in numerous city agencies, including, but not limited to, the city's Department of Public Works. Within the department, CUB represents numerous different classifications— in the Bureau of Water and Wastewater, we represent water treatment center facilities employees and water meter readers. In the Bureau of Solid Waste, CUB represents midlevel supervisors.

We come before you today because our city is, unfortunately, one of the most dangerous places to work in the nation, and has been for some time. Not only does it appear that DPW, according to the OIG report, has experienced a staggering 1.3 injuries per workday over the past 5 years, but over the last decade, MOSH has cited Baltimore City for over 330 safety violations, including confined space hazards, fall risks, high-voltage electrical exposures, and a lack of respiratory protection and other safety equipment. Roughly one third of those safety violations over that decade were within city DPW alone, an extraordinary number that spans multiple administrations. One would be hard-pressed to find an employer in the country with a worse workplace safety record. And we must note, these are not minor infractions. They are violations that put workers in immediate danger of serious injury or death.

After DPW employee and City Union of Baltimore member Trina Cunningham's death in 2019, AFT undertook a project of delving deeper into workplace safety issues for city employment, culminating in our report from 2022, (and which the OIG's report cites on page 43 of her report). Beyond the discovery of the numbers cited above, one of the components of this project was to visit our members at their worksites, to talk to them about their working conditions, and to be sure they knew their rights. The departments we especially concentrated on within the city were not just DPW, but also the Department of Transportation, the Department of General Services, and the Department of Health. Responses from administrators to our presence at these sites were mixed, and dependent upon the department itself. The Department of Health and Transportation, for example, were quite cooperative and helpful; in contrast DPW admin threatened us with removal from the premises, even when we were standing on public, right-of-way spaces like sidewalks.

CUB and AFT, also as a result of this work on city employee safety after 2019, endeavored to get a number of city employees who were CUB members OSHA 10 and OSHA 30 certified, so as to have a workforce educated on the dangers they may encounter on a daily basis, and how to mitigate those dangers. Three city employees who were CUB members elected to become OSHA-certified trainers, a more-intensive program, requiring 8 days of classroom instruction. AFT/CUB paid for the members to attend this program; but the leave requests to attend these seminars to become OSHA-certified trainers was denied by the city; each of them used their own personal or vacation time to attend these seminars. Two of them are still employed by the city; one left a few years ago his employment in DPW because of retaliation.

With a new DPW director, many of the building safety concerns CUB members have had are beginning to be addressed. However, as I believe the OIG report highlights, the need persists for updated, clear policies and standard operating procedures, as well as the resources to regularly train and educate the workforce on these policies and other rights and responsibilities employees have regarding workplace safety. Beyond city employees who are already certified to provide workplace safety trainings, the city can also reach out to MOSH for trainings, and MOSH will provide these to the city free of charge.

We also must bring forth the fact that the state's new heat stress regulations went into effect September 30th of 2024. These regulations require employees, including Baltimore City, design a plan to identify and mediate heat-related workplace safety concerns and "provide initial heat stress training to employees and supervisors [...] prior to an employee's first exposure to heat." We believe the details of this plan must be a subject of bargaining with the certified employee unions, as these are material workplace conditions that impact the safety of our members. And we hope the city will engage with their employee unions immediately on these plans and standards; the climate conditions that require a plan be put in place can happen any day now, and without a plan in place, we again are inviting tragedy to strike our city employees. The time to act is now; let us work together to resolve these issues so that Baltimore City may again be a safe place to work. Our members love our city and take pride in the communities they call home, they must be treated with the care and respect they deserve.

Thank you.