



Contact: Kat Cancio
845-271-9651
kcancio@afscme.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 11/30/22

Judge hears Walters Workers United lawsuit over Walters Art Museum refusal to comply with public information request

BALTIMORE- Walters Workers United (WWU), organizing with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), participated in a virtual hearing today presided by Judge John Nugent regarding a lawsuit they filed against The Walters Art Museum in September. WWU filed the lawsuit after museum leadership rejected a Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) request for documents related to internal correspondence over the staff's unionization efforts.

During the hearing, which was held through the Baltimore City Circuit Court, lawyers for Walters Workers United emphasized the importance of the MPIA in holding public institutions and entities like The Walters Art Museum accountable. Citing ample evidence proving The Walters' status as a government entity, including the museum's IRS filings and National Endowment for the Humanities grant forms, WWU asserted that the museum must comply with any MPIA requests since it has long identified itself as a public institution. The Walters even completed paperwork for Public Service Loan Forgiveness by checking "yes" to the box under "governmental organization," despite having the option to check one of several boxes indicating status as a nongovernmental organization.

"Transparency and accountability are essential to the healthy functioning of any public institution and are the cornerstones of civil society in the United States. I am honored to serve the city and people of Baltimore by caring for the municipal collections of the Walters Art Museum," said Gregory Bailey, a senior objects conservator at The Walters. "The Public information act safeguards public trust in the proper functioning and good governance of our institution."

Despite acknowledging that it is a government entity when it is convenient to do so, the Walters nevertheless claims it is not covered by the MPIA, which exists to hold government entities accountable to the public.

"The Walters Art Museum claims it is a private entity only when it wants to evade transparency and accountability to the public required of governmental entities under the MPIA or when it comes to organizing our union." says Lex Reehill, a Monitor Room Officer.

WWU is calling for transparency at the Walters, which exists to benefit the public. "The Walters is an invaluable institution made up of many skilled and hardworking employees and decisions regarding the safety and pay of those employees should not be shrouded in secrecy as they are now." says Garrett Stralnic, Gallery Officer.

Indeed, in 1974, a The Sun news article proclaimed, "The Walters and all it contains are ours... We own them because Henry Walters left what he and his dad had collected, and the place where he kept it all, to the City of Baltimore in 1931... It is ours."

###