

Proposed Project Labor Agreement in Baltimore Opposed by Large Companies, Minority Construction Contractors

By Michael R. Hatcher

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An effort by several Baltimore City Councilmembers to mandate project labor agreements (PLAs) for certain large city contracts has triggered strong opposition from the city's contracting community.

Although there is often friction between large contractors and smaller minority-owned contractors, they are united in opposition to the current legislation, as they have been in other cities across the country. The Maryland Minority Contractors Association has joined with the local chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors to oppose the PLA plan.

According to [Baltimore Sun](#), a bill introduced by Council President Brandon Scott and Councilmember Shannon Sneed reportedly would require unions and contractors to "establish agreements ahead of any contract valued above \$25 million or long-term capital projects at multiple locations that are together valued at more than \$15 million."

PLA proponents argue that the agreements will ensure competitive wages and benefits and increase local hiring. Opponents respond that nonunion contractors pay wages similar to those paid by union contractors, without forcing employees to pay union dues, and that the PLAs often have the negative effect of reducing local hiring.

Opponents argue that because the contracting community in Baltimore, and in Maryland generally, is largely nonunionized, PLAs will result in the use of union construction workers from outside the city and the state. As evidence, opponents cite the PLA that governed construction of the Nationals Park baseball stadium in Washington, D.C., which required that at least 50 percent of journeyman hours on the project be performed by D.C. residents; in fact, according to many reports, non-D.C. residents worked over 70 percent of journeymen hours.

Minority and female-owned construction contractors, key constituencies in Baltimore, are less likely than larger contractors to be unionized. They also oppose PLAs. The opposition by minority contractors to the Baltimore PLA proposal follows opposition to similar proposals in Oakland, California, in 2019 and in other cities across the country.

Please contact a Jackson Lewis attorney with any questions.

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Meet the Author



Michael R. Hatcher

Principal
Washington, D.C. Region 703-483-8328
Email

Practices

Labor Relations

Industries

Construction

on this website.

*The National Operations Center serves as the firm's central administration hub and houses the firm's Facilities, Finance, Human Resources and Technology departments.