

KATIE FRY HESTER
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Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 2nd, 2021

**Testimony in Support of SB69 - Maryland Emergency Management Agency -
Cybersecurity Coordinations and Operations Office - Establishment**

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 69. Last year, just before I presented this bill to this committee, the Federal Government's bipartisan US Cyberspace Solarium Commission issued its 182 page report. In it, the Commission highlighted a major takeaway of the current state of cybersecurity within the United States. The Commission states:

"The U.S. government is currently not designed to act with the speed and agility necessary to defend the country in cyberspace... We must get faster and smarter, improving the government's ability to organize concurrent, continuous, and collaborative efforts to build resilience, [and] respond to cyber threats..."

Over the past two years I have had the honor of serving as the co-chair of the Joint Committee on Cybersecurity, IT, and Biotechnology, and as a member of the Attorney General's Cybersecurity Council. Given my experience in these roles, it is with great concern that I must say, many of the issues identified by our counterparts in the U.S. Congress are not at all unique to the Federal government, and may in fact be more extensive at the State and local level. While actors around Maryland have been doing their best to address the grave risk that cybersecurity threats pose to critical infrastructure and systems, we still face large challenges in terms of coordinating resources effectively, making technical improvements to existing systems, sharing information and best practices across silos, and building the partnerships and knowledge base necessary to build resilience and response capacity to cybersecurity threats.

Senate Bill 69 seeks to address these issues by creating a Cybersecurity Coordination and Operations Office within the Maryland Emergency Management Agency. The Office would be responsible for improving local, regional and statewide cybersecurity readiness by coordinating the activities of state and local entities as pertains to cybersecurity, and connecting these actors with the resources necessary to achieve their cybersecurity goals. This would include facilitating the exchange of information between political subdivisions, coordinating the provision of technical services, completing risk assessments, and developing up-to-date cyber disruption plans.

The Office would bring to bear a regional and organizational approach to managing the risks of cybersecurity threats, similar to those employed for natural disaster preparedness or the opioid crisis. In many ways, responding to and preparing for cybersecurity risks are very similar to natural disasters, in that they require continuous, collaborative effort, and that the proactive measures we take today will pay off the next time there is a cybersecurity incident. Cybersecurity threats can also vary greatly in scale and disruptive effect, making the need for a standing coordinating entity to build on pre-existing emergency response relationships and increase Maryland's cyber resilience capacity all the more urgent.

In 2019, Atlanta, Georgia; New Bedford, Massachusetts; New Orleans, Louisiana; Greenville, North Carolina; Pensacola, Florida; Wilmer, Texas; St. Lucie Florida; and our very own Baltimore City were victims of cybersecurity attacks, with costs in recovery and lost revenue stretching into the millions. In 2020 we have experienced a slew of cybersecurity attacks aimed at local governments and school systems, not the least of which is our very own Baltimore County Public Schools. With bad actors becoming more sophisticated, and the prevalence of cyber threats rising at almost every level of government and industry, the risk of a cyberattack is no longer "if," it's "when." This bill will make Maryland a leader in the nation, creating a first of its kind regional and cross-governmental structure capable of coordinating response and preparedness for cybersecurity threats in a variety of forms. I would also note for the committee's attention that this bill passed the Senate unanimously last session in this exact form. With this legislation we can adequately protect our constituents, and provide for a more effective defense of the State of Maryland. **I respectfully urge a favorable report for SB69.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Carroll and Howard Counties