



## Senate Bill 298

### *Criminal Law - Threat Against Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: February 8, 2022

From: D'Paul Nibber

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 298. This bill would create criminal penalties for threats leveled against employees of state and local health departments and hospital staff members as they attempt to carry out their duties. For the 2022 legislative session, MACo has prioritized the wellbeing of public-facing civil servants - including those who operate our local health departments - as one of its four legislative priorities. Especially during a pandemic, no health care worker should be subject to a work environment made even more difficult due to threats and harassment.

In late 2021, The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) pressed the federal government to intervene and protect local public health officials from threats of violence. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, these officials have been subject to heightened pressures and scrutiny for actions taken to save lives. The resulting impact has been devastating.

NACCHO reports more than 300 public health department leaders have left their posts throughout the pandemic. In Maryland, two prominent health officers resigned during this same period. MACo's affiliate, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers, reports threats and harassment to its members have increased in volume and intensity in response to decisions made to protect the public from the COVID-19 virus.

In response, the state should both protect and reaffirm the importance of our health care workers, both public and private. For this reason, MACo **SUPPORTS** SB 298 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.