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Testimony on Senate Bill 619
Courts - Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: Favorable

Maryland Nonprofits is a statewide association of more than 1500 nonprofit organizations and institutions. We urge you to support Senate Bill 619 to limit meritless lawsuits filed to for the purpose of cutting off public opposition and preventing the exercise of First Amendment rights.

“SLAPP”, or strategic lawsuits against public participation, are lawsuits that are intended to censor, intimidate, and silence critics by burdening them with the cost of a legal defense until they abandon their criticism or opposition. A lawsuit is a SLAPP suit if it is brought against a person based on an act or statement of the person that was done or made in furtherance of the person’s right of petition or free speech under the U.S. Constitution, the Maryland Constitution, or the Maryland Declaration of Rights in connection with a public issue or an issue of public interest.

Unfortunately, these types of lawsuits became so pervasive and successful at chilling speech that Maryland, along with 28 other states, passed anti-SLAPP laws. However, Maryland’s anti-SLAPP law is outdated, and in need of reform.

Senate Bill 619 will provide the necessary updates by redefining SLAPP lawsuits and by providing grounds for dismissal, expedited motions to dismiss, and awards of attorney’s fees against the filing party. This is necessary to protect Marylanders’ First Amendment rights, and ensure that Marylanders are not brought to court to defend meritless suits for expressing their beliefs and opinions.

We urge you to continue the effort to protect weaker defendants, ranging from community groups to environmental advocates, and to victims of crime and abuse, from oppressive and intimidating litigation.

We ask that you give Senate Bill 619 a Favorable Report.



Maryland Nonprofits’ mission is to strengthen organizations and networks for greater quality of life and equity.