

HB585_PGCEX_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Angela Alsobrooks

Position: FAV



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: HB 585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024

SPONSOR: The Speaker (By Request - Administration)

HEARING DATE: February 6, 2024

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS HB 585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024**, which prohibits a person from threatening to harm an election official or an immediate family member of an election official because of the election official's role in administering the election process, with violations subject to penalties of imprisonment for up to three years and/or a fine of up to \$2,500.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) indicates that in recent years election officials, staff, and poll workers have been subjected to threats, accusations of crime, and leaked private information ("doxing") at much higher rates than usual. According to information updated by NCSL in December 2023, 14 states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington) have enacted laws specifically addressing protections for election officials and poll workers since 2020.

Additionally, a 2022 Brennan Center for Justice poll of election officials showed that more than half of respondents expressed concerns about the safety of their colleagues. Nearly one in three knew at least one colleague who quit their job partly or entirely because of safety concerns, increased threats, or intimidation.

This bill addresses the epidemic of threats and harassment targeting election officials that pose a fundamental threat to Maryland's ability to conduct free and fair elections. It does this by creating a new misdemeanor charge in the Election Law Article for threats against election officials or their families, prosecutable by either States' Attorneys or the Office of the State Prosecutor.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS HB 585** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.

WDC Testimony_HB585_FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: Beth Tomasello

Position: FAV



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

House Bill HB585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024
Judiciary Committee – February 6, 2024
SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2024 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic clubs with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of HB585, amended to expand the definition of "election official."

This bill makes it illegal, upon proof of requisite intent, to threaten to harm an election official or an election official's immediate family member because of the election official's role in administering the election process. To do so would be a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment not exceeding three years or a fine not exceeding \$2500, or both.

Since 2022, according to [Public Citizen](#), 15 states have adopted laws protecting election officials from threat. Maryland is not on that list. This bill will correct that gap in protection for critical, often frontline, Maryland election officials who perform vital tasks that ensure our elections are conducted fairly and with integrity. Historically, the most common poll worker pre-COVID was an older white woman ([VoA News](#)); the proportion of poll workers ages 61-70 and 71 and older [increased](#) in 2022 from 2020. (That report had no poll worker gender data.) This bill would help ensure that women, older people, and other poll workers can serve without fear. The bill will also allay anticipatory safety concerns that have contributed to what some reports suggest will be a significant shortage of election officials in the 2024 election. Further, as voters, women have the right to expect that election officials can do their job free from fear for themselves and their family members. As demonstrated in the 2020 election (most famously in Georgia, but elsewhere as well), election officials risk harassment, character defamation, and worse just for doing their job. The 2024 elections are certain to be contentious; passing this bill in the 2024 legislative session will protect these officials, contributing to a well-functioning democratic process in our state.

WDC recommends amending HB585 to expand the definition of "election official" to include volunteers lawfully positioned outside a polling location who support a particular issue or candidate and who are distributing literature or engaging prospective voters in conversation; representatives of a political party, lawfully present outside a polling location, who are providing information to voters and logistical support to their party's candidates; and challengers, watchers, and other legally authorized election observers. Although these individuals are volunteers, they are also likely targets of the kind of threats and harm identified in this bill. They deserve the same protections.

We ask for your support for HB585, with amendment, and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Tazeen Ahmad
WDC President

Ginna Ingram
WDC Advancing Democracy in
Maryland Subcommittee

Cynthia Rubenstein
Chair, WDC Advocacy

HB0585-JUD_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Brianna January

Position: FAV



House Bill 585

Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: February 6, 2024

From: Sarah Sample and Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 585. This bill would protect and defend the staff who manage and conduct elections, by making it a misdemeanor to threaten election officials or their immediate family members.

Counties facilitate federal, state, and local elections for all communities across Maryland. Local election officials, board members, employees, and judges are indispensable to this process. Threats and intimidating behavior toward these officials can have devastating consequences for the integrity and efficiency of this critical practice.

Counties believe the provisions of HB 585 will allow for corrective actions to be taken to mitigate these concerning and persistent behaviors. Local jurisdictions rely on enthusiastic election workers and facilitators to step into these vital roles, but unregulated threats and divisive actions will continue to discourage good, qualified candidates from facilitating elections. Additionally, residents will be deterred from engaging in elections if they don't feel safe at a local polling location.

Adopting necessary protections specific to these local officials will allow local governments to continue carrying out fair, safe, and accessible elections across Maryland. For these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report for HB 585.

GMOM_HB585_020624.pdf

Uploaded by: Charlie Cooper

Position: FAV



Get Money Out – Maryland

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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 585
PROTECTING ELECTION OFFICIALS ACT OF 2024
February 6, 2024
By Charlie Cooper, President**

Get Money Out–Maryland is an all-volunteer force seeking to get big money out of our political system and make elections fairer. We believe that every citizen should have equal access to the ballot as a voter or as a candidate. District lines should be fair to every voter, regardless of race, ethnicity, or party affiliation. The corruption of big money in politics must be eliminated, and the disproportionate influence of concentrated wealth reduced.

We strongly support House Bill 585 to counter the disturbing trend of threats against election officials and even against citizen election judges. We are enormously proud of the election workforce across the nation. Regardless of party affiliation, they almost unanimously withstood intense pressure to mischaracterize election results. Fair election laws and rules held because of their courage.

Nevertheless, misinformation continues to swirl. News reports have documented a drastically higher level of threats against election officials, workers, and citizen election judges. We are concerned that another increase in this kind of activity could cause even more vacancies in these vital positions. Passing this legislation is a sensible step to give the election workforce a sense of security.

Get Money Out – Maryland is pleased to see that this bill has bipartisan support. We urge a favorable report on House Bill 585.

Testimony for HB0575 Victim Compensation.pdf

Uploaded by: Deborah Haskins

Position: FAV

Testimony for HB0575 Victim Compensation -Alterations (Victim Compensation Reform Act of 2024)

Testimony Submitted by: Dr. Deborah G. Haskins, mother of 2013 Baltimore City Homicidal Victim Joseph F. Haskins (deceased) and aunt of 2014 Baltimore County Homicidal Victim Reuben C. Haskins. I am a resident of Baltimore City (Delegate Attar district)

Good afternoon Delegate Clippinger and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you Gov. Moore for your commitment to reforming this Bill.

My name is Dr. Deborah G. Haskins. I am a lifelong resident of Baltimore City. Today, I am here representing our son Joseph “JoJo” and our nephew Reuben Haskins. They are not homicide numbers—they are loved, they have families, had dreams. I represent ALL families affected by criminal injuries.

I thought homicide happened to other people until it happened to us!

In the State of Maryland, there is a lack of advocacy for criminal injuries assistance. How do I know? We were not contacted by the State until **5 years later!** I learned from another mom of a murdered daughter whose son played basketball with JoJo.

The proposed Bill will overhaul needed changes! First, we must expand who qualifies. His fiancé, stepson, and JoJo and Reuben’s siblings did not qualify. JoJo’s daughter, 2 months at the time, would never know her father except through our sharing. My husband’s heart was murdered and he died of collateral damage of criminal injuries in 2016.

Second, the current law provides up to 3 years of counseling and capped. It is a REIMBURSEMENT MODEL! This is unacceptable. The current law discriminates against persons who have limited material resources to first pay for counseling and then wait to get their money back. It took 8 months to be reimbursed! We gave up.

I am asking that you please vote for this bill reform so that EVERY VICTIM in Maryland can get compassionate care right from the start. Allowing them to breathe with the support available in their communities without searching. We become a state and a world of more people who love and who learn to live and love again. My prayer is that every victim of a criminal injury sees Maryland as a State of hope and healing. Thank you!

Testimony for HB0575 Victim Compensation.pdf

Uploaded by: Deborah Haskins

Position: FAV

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Written testimony

Uploaded by: Jared DeMarinis

Position: FAV



Maryland State Board of Elections

HB 585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024 - FAVORABLE

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the State Board of Elections, I am pleased to support House Bill 585 to establish penalties in the Election Law Article for threats and harassment against election officials.

As the members of this committee are well aware, there has been a great deal of national attention to threats and harassment against election officials. Some of our colleagues in other states and their families have had to arrange for 24-hour police protection, have had their spouses and children targeted, had to leave their homes or had their property vandalized.

As public officials, of course, we are used to some amount of discontent from candidates and voters who are not happy with the outcome of an election. But freedom of speech cannot be allowed to cross the line into making personal threats against the life or safety of an election official, a poll worker, or a member of their family.

We were fortunate in the State of Maryland that we did not experience the same extent of the threats in the last presidential election as some of our colleagues in swing states. But we should not wait to take action until we have local news coverage here in Maryland of a child or a spouse of an election official or a poll worker being threatened because of that official's role in the election process.

This is an important bill to support our staff, of course, but I want to emphasize that we also need this bill to help us recruit and retain Election Judges. The General Assembly demonstrated its commitment to Election Judges by passing legislation last year to increase their pay. By supporting this legislation, you will further demonstrate your support for the Election Judges who serve their community at the polls by making it possible for us to assure them that we are doing everything we can to protect them against threats and harassment.

Thank you and we look forward to your favorable passage of this bill.

Jared DeMarinis, State Administrator of Elections

Contacts:

*Jared DeMarinis, State Administrator of Elections
410-269-2853 or jared.demarinis@maryland.gov*

*Jennifer McLaughlin, Policy Analyst and Director of Mail-In Voting
410-269-2849 or jennifer.mclaughlin@maryland.gov*

**JARED DeMARINIS, STATE ADMINISTRATOR
STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS**

JUD 2/6/2024

HB 585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024

Uploaded by: Joanne Antoine

Position: FAV

February 6, 2024

**Testimony on HB 585
Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024
Judiciary Committee**

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 585 which would create a new and reasonable misdemeanor charge for those who threaten state and local election officials or their families.

Election officials throughout Maryland and the nation are demanding that protections be put in place as they prepare for upcoming elections. Many of them have been the target of ongoing threats and harassment, with some even leaving their roles out of fear. A poll by the Brennan Center found that [45% of local election officials](#) said they fear for the safety of their colleagues. Nearly one in three election officials have been harassed, abused, or threatened because of their job, and more than one in five are concerned about being physically assaulted on the job in future elections.

As a result, roughly 11% of election officials have said they are very or somewhat likely to resign before the November 2024 election – a situation we must prevent from happening here in Maryland.

In response to these unfortunate events and out of concern for losing much of the technical expertise and knowledge needed to administer our election – complex processes that new staffers can't quickly learn, fifteen state legislatures have taken action by passing urgent reforms to protect their election workers. Maryland must do the same to ensure those essential to our democracy feel confident that they can run our elections in a safe environment.

HB 585 aims to address this by establishing a misdemeanor charge that will hopefully function as a deterrent to prevent future extremists from targeting our state and local election officials, including election judges.

With the 2024 elections right around the corner, it is critical the Maryland General Assembly work in a bipartisan manner to pass this legislation – sending a message that it will do all it can to ensure election officials throughout the state are protected as they work to administer and assist voters heading to the polls.

Protecting for our election officials will ensure that Maryland elections continue to be safe, secure, and accessible. For those reasons, we urge a favorable report.

HB585- Election Worker Protections 2024.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: John Michael Gudger

Position: FAV



Maryland Association of Election Officials

Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

February 6, 2024

Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair
Maryland House Judiciary Committee
Room 101, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

HB585 – Support

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett and Committee Members:

My name is John Michael Gudger, chair of the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) Legislative Committee. I am writing on behalf of MAEO to voice support for the Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024. This legislation is not only timely but essential in ensuring the safety and security of those at the forefront of preserving our democratic processes.

Election officials, from state administrators to local election judges, dedicate themselves to the administration of fair, free, and transparent elections. Their commitment to democracy requires them to work long hours under intense scrutiny and, increasingly, under the cloud of personal risk. The escalation of threats against election officials and their families is not only deeply concerning but also an affront to the principles of democracy that we all hold dear.

House Bill 585 addresses these concerns head-on by establishing clear legal protections for election officials and their immediate family members. By making it a misdemeanor to knowingly and willfully threaten to harm an election official because of their role in administering elections, this bill sends a clear message that Maryland stands firmly against intimidation and violence.

The definitions provided in the bill for terms such as "election official," "harm," "immediate family member," and "threat" are comprehensive and inclusive, ensuring that all forms of intimidation, whether verbal, electronic, or written, are covered. This breadth is crucial, given the variety of ways in which threats can be communicated in our digital age.

Furthermore, the penalties outlined in the bill, including imprisonment of up to three years or a fine not exceeding \$2,500 or both, serve as a significant deterrent against such reprehensible behavior. It is imperative that we establish strong legal repercussions to protect those who serve our democracy from any form of intimidation or harm.

The Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024 is a necessary step in safeguarding our election officials and their families. It provides much-needed legal protections and underscores our collective commitment to maintaining the integrity of our elections. As representatives of the Local Board of Elections, we witness firsthand the dedication of our officials and the challenges they face. Ensuring their safety is not only a matter of personal security but also of public trust in our electoral system.

We urge the committee to favorably report House Bill 585 and thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

John Michael Gudger
johnmichael.gudger@maryland.gov
Chair, MAEO Legislative Committee

BGV Letter of Support - HB0585, 2024.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Lauren Wyatt

Position: FAV



Position: Favorable
House Judiciary Committee

To: The Honorable Speaker (By Request - Administration) and the Honorable Delegates Allen, Amprey, Anderton, Bagnall, Bartlett, Bhandari, Boaf, Bouchat, Boyce, Charkoudian, Conaway, Crutchfield, Davis, Ebersole, Embry, Fennell, Foley, Fraser-Hidalgo, Grossman, Guyton, Guzzone, Harris, Harrison, Henson, Hill, Ivey, Jackson, A. Johnson, S. Johnson, D. Jones, Kaufman, J. Long, Lopez, Love, McCaskill, T. Morgan, Munoz, Palakovich Carr, Pasteur, Patterson, Phillips, Pruski, Roberson, Roberts, Ruff, Ruth, Simmons, Simpson, Solomon, Spiegel, Stewart, Taveras, Taylor, Toles, Turner, Valderrama, Watson, White Holland, Williams, and Wu.

Greetings,

My name is Lauren Wyatt and I am the Advocacy Lead for Black Girls Vote, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to engaging, educating, and empowering black women to activate their voice by using their vote. I would like to thank the House Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to share why this issue is important to our organization.

Black Girls Vote has four main pillars: economic development, education, healthcare and of course voting rights. We are committed to democracy and protecting our right to free and fair elections. We do this by cultivating a community of informed citizens and mobilizing them to polls through voter registration. However, at a time where protecting our right to vote is pivotal to maintaining democracy, we must also acknowledge the importance of protecting election officials.

For this reason, we urge support for HB0585 which would prohibit a person from knowingly and willfully making a threat to harm an election official or an immediate family member of an election official because of the election official's role in administering the election process. Below you will find more reasons why it is imperative that we put measures in place to protect election officials:

1. In recent years election officials, staff and poll workers have been subjected to threats, accusations of crime and leaked private information (doxing) at much higher rates than usual.¹

¹ <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-laws-providing-protection-for-election-officials-and-staff>



2. Data shows that nearly one in three election officials have been harassed, abused, or threatened because of their job. ²

We must address this state and national issue. Since 2020, 14 states have passed bills that enforce protections for election officials. We urge support for this bill which would make Maryland another state to take proactive steps to protect election officials in the same manner that they protect public officials.

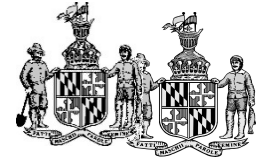
Sincerely,

Lauren A. Wyatt, MS
Advocacy Lead
Black Girls Vote, Inc.
Email: lwyatt@blackgirlsvote.com

CLO.Testimony - HB585 - Protecting Election Offici

Uploaded by: Meghan Music

Position: FAV



WES MOORE
GOVERNOR

STATE HOUSE
100 STATE CIRCLE
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND
21401-1925

February 6, 2024

SUPPORT for HB 585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024

Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024.

This legislation is intended to stop the rising number of threats and harassment targeting election officials, which poses a fundamental threat to our State's ability to conduct free and fair elections. It is a "good government" bill that seeks to protect all election officials, regardless of party. These everyday heroes are on the front lines, making elections happen – and this bill says to election officials throughout our State that their work is essential, that they are valued, and that their safety matters.

Current law prohibits the obstruction of official electoral activities and interference with an election official in the performance of their official duties – but does not protect an election official who is targeted because of their role in administering the election process. HB 585 would create a new misdemeanor charge in the Election Law Article for threats against election officials or their families. Upon conviction, a person who violates the Act would be subject to imprisonment (not exceeding three years); a fine (not exceeding \$2500); or both – which corresponds with the penalties for threatening a State or local official.

Because of the hostility that election officials now face, many are reconsidering their roles within the electoral process. According to a recent Brennan Center poll of election officials across the country, nearly one in three election officials have been harassed, abused, or threatened because of their job; 45% of election officials say they fear for the safety of their colleagues; and 20% of local administrators say they are likely to leave their jobs before the 2024 Presidential Election (Brennan Center for Justice, 2023.)

This turnover rate of election officials is concerning and has been referred to as a "brain drain." Staffing can be an issue at any time, but given the current political climate, greater numbers of election officials are resigning or retiring – taking their experience and institutional knowledge with them. In knowing that election officials are protected under this legislation, we hope that HB 585 also will serve to help recruit and retain the invaluable service of these dedicated and hard working public servants.

On behalf of the Moore-Miller Administration, I urge a favorable report on HB 585.

Yours in Service,

Eric Luedtke
Chief Legislative Officer

2-6 LH HB585 Protecting Election Officials Act of

Uploaded by: Nikki Tyree

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

HB 585 Protecting Election Officials Act 2024

POSITION: Favorable

BY: Linda Kohn, President

DATE: February 6, 2024

The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization with a mission to educate all voters and expand civic involvement. LWVMD's position on Voting Rights and Election Administration calls for an election system that is representative, feasible to implement and increases voter participation. Protecting elections officials is a crucial element of preserving the democratic system.

As Maryland, and much of the country, saw during the elections of 2022 it is becoming more and more common for election officials to experience harm, harassment, bullying, threats, and in rare cases doxxing. HB585 would aid our elections system by giving officials recourse if they are in danger. The passage of this bill could also persuade those who are contemplating becoming judges that they will be protected.

Election judges typically work a 15- or 16-hour day on Election Day, plus mandatory participation at polling places set up the night before, which can take another two hours, as well as hours during Early Voting. Officials also go through extensive training that is unpaid.

Many election judges sign up because they feel a strong commitment to civic duty and enjoy helping voters. However, recruiting enough judges has become increasingly challenging for local election boards. Finding, training, and retaining enough people to staff polling places is not easy. This year the need for judges is even greater. In 2020 and again in 2022 Maryland has seen shortages in needed judges. LWVMD is hopeful that an increase in pay for returning judges will inspire many to reprise the role, but safety remains a top concern. HB585 addresses these concerns.

The League of Women Voters urges a favorable report on HB 585.

HB585WrittenSupport -FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: Ruth Sweeney

Position: FAV

CHARLTON T. HOWARD III
State Prosecutor

SARAH R. DAVID
Deputy State Prosecutor

LETAM DUSON
ABIGAIL E. TICSE
MARY W. SETZER
CASSIE MATHIAS
Senior Assistant State Prosecutors

STATE OF MARYLAND



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SUPPORT FOR HB 585

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

We are writing to express the support of the Office of the State Prosecutor for House Bill 585. The Office of the State Prosecutor is tasked with enforcement of Maryland election laws and believes that this legislation will aid in protecting election judges in Maryland and preserving the integrity of the electoral process.

The Office of the State Prosecutor

The Office of the State Prosecutor is an independent agency within the Executive Branch of government. The Office is tasked with ensuring the honesty and integrity of State government and elections by conducting thorough, independent investigations and, when appropriate, prosecutions of criminal conduct affecting the integrity of our State and local government institutions, officials, employees and elections.

Election Judges- Protections

This legislation ensures that those who volunteer to protect the integrity of Maryland's elections are protected when threatened because of their service. Election judges around the country have been threatened and harassed, with their personal information shared on social media sites encouraging people to go to their homes and even cause them physical harm. This has resulted in the local boards of elections around the State seeing a decrease in volunteers to serve as election judges.

Fortunately, Maryland has a committed cohort of individuals who are willing to serve as election law judges despite modern challenges. However, as modern challenges have emerged, the law has not caught up with addressing those challenges. The way the current law is drafted only addresses interference with the electoral process and neglects to protect the individuals who serve as election law judges. The law also does not address the vast array of threats that derive from social media and non-physical means. This body, wisely, has expanded the law in areas of harassment and stalking to address the non-physical harms caused by social media attacks and "doxxing" (publishing private information about an individual on the internet, often with malicious intent) and we are asking to extend those protections to those who serve the public by ensuring transparency and fairness in the electoral process.

This legislation mirrors language from stalking, harassment, and other statutes in determining what constitutes "a threat" and "serious emotional distress." The language has been litigated and

defined by Maryland courts as well as within the statutory scheme of the Criminal Law code. We hope that in ensuring this protection for election judges, we are better able to comprehensively address challenges that may arise during voting and give security assurances to those who volunteer to maintain fair elections in Maryland.

We encourage this Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 585.

Sincerely,

CHARLTON T. HOWARD
STATE PROSECUTOR

2024-02-02 IRGA Written Testimony in Support of MD

Uploaded by: Sherry Nickerson

Position: FAV

Institute *for* Responsive Government Action

The Institute for Responsive Government Action respectfully submits the following testimony in support of House Bill 585, the Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024:

House Bill 585 would **provide necessary protections for election officials who face unprecedented threats while performing their essential duties of administering free and fair elections**. As such, the Institute for Responsive Government Action wholeheartedly supports the passage of House Bill 585.

In the past two years, **numerous states across the political spectrum have passed laws increasing protections for election workers against threats, intimidation, and other risks** that may occur in the course of their duties. Like House Bill 585, these laws often include provisions that make it a crime to threaten, intimidate, or harass an election official based on their role in administering the elections process. This includes states like Oklahoma (SB 481), Arkansas (HB 1457), Minnesota (HF 3), New Mexico (SB 43), Nevada (SB 406), Colorado (HB 1273), and Vermont (S 265).

Threats to election officials not only harm election officials themselves, but also negatively impact the voter experience and the smooth running of elections. National surveys of elections officials report that **threats and harassment contribute to turnover of experienced elections administrators**. Similarly, threats and harassment make it **more difficult to recruit pollworkers** and other temporary election workers.¹

With this bill, the Maryland General Assembly has the opportunity to protect the public servants responsible for ensuring that elections remain free and fair.

The Institute for Responsive Government Action is dedicated to ensuring state and federal governments work effectively for the very people they serve. Responsive Gov Action works to provide legislative advice and action, polling, and testimony in order to find practical policy solutions that make government systems more efficient, accessible, and responsive for everyday Americans.

¹ See, e.g., Brennan Center for Justice, [Poll of Election Officials Shows High Turnover Amid Safety Threats and Political Interference](#) (2023).

Zainab Chaudry testimony HB0585.pdf

Uploaded by: Zainab Chaudry

Position: FAV



February 6, 2024

Honorable Chair Luke Clippinger
House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB0585 Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024

Dear Chair Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 585 Protecting Election Officials Act. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

I am writing to provide testimony on the critical importance of safeguarding election judges from threats and harm, particularly in light of the alarming trend of individuals targeting election officials and their families due to their involvement in the electoral process.

Election judges play a fundamental role in ensuring the integrity, fairness, and transparency of our democratic system. They work tirelessly to facilitate the voting process, uphold election laws, and safeguard the rights of voters. However, in recent years, there has been a disturbing rise in threats, intimidation, and violence directed at election judges, posing a grave threat to the democratic process itself.

Threats to harm an election official, or their immediate family members because of their role in administering elections not only jeopardize the safety and well-being of these individuals but also undermine the very foundation of our democracy. Such acts of intimidation are intended to silence dissent, undermine public trust in the electoral process, and disrupt the functioning of our democratic institutions.

This legislation has personal significance to me as well. In the past, I experienced hostile, intimidating behavior while serving as an election judge in Howard County that led me to be concerned for my safety as I walked to my car in the parking lot at the end of my shift.

It is imperative that we take decisive action to protect election judges and their families from threats and ensure that they can carry out their duties without fear of reprisal. The proposed legislation to establish penalties for those who threaten or harm election officials is an important deterrent and a step in this direction.

By making it clear that threatening or harming election officials is a punishable offense, we send a strong message that such behavior will not be tolerated in our society. Moreover, by imposing meaningful penalties, including imprisonment and fines, we uphold the rule of law and deter individuals from engaging in such reprehensible acts.

In conclusion, protecting election judges from threats and harm is not only a matter of safeguarding individual safety but also of defending the integrity and credibility of our democratic process. I urge you to support HB0585 and take concrete steps to ensure that election officials can carry out their vital duties without fear or intimidation.

Thank you for considering my testimony on this important issue

Sincerely,

Zainab Chaudry, Pharm.D.
Director, CAIR Office in Maryland
Council on American-Islamic Relations
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2024-02-06 HB585 (Support with Amendments).pdf

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February 6, 2024

TO: The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, Judiciary Committee

FROM: Adam Spangler
Legislative Aide, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: HB585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024 – **(Support w/
Amendments)**

The Office of the Attorney General requests the Committee report Governor Wes Moore's **House Bill 585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024** favorably with amendments. House Bill 585 creates a new criminal offense in the Election Law Article for threatening an election official or the election official's family because of the election official's role in administering the election process.

Election officials work long hours during the election cycle, ensuring that the gears of democracy continue to turn. However, being an election official has come under scrutiny and election officials have been threatened at a much greater rate in recent election cycles.¹ According to a 2023 Brennan Center for Justice poll, election officials are under attack and leaving their jobs. More than half of the respondents to the polls expressed concerns about their safety and the safety of their colleagues. Nearly one in three election officials report knowing at

¹ Gross, Joelle and Baltz, Samuel and Suttman-Lea, Mara and Merivaki, Thessalia and Stewart III, Charles, Online Hostility Towards Local Election Officials Surged in 2020 (February 8, 2023). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4351996> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4351996>

least one colleague who quit their job partly or entirely because of safety concerns, increased threats, or intimidation.²

The Office of Attorney General would like to offer the following amendment. The definition of House Bill 585 “election official” includes many individuals who have a role in administering the election process, however, the definition does not include counsel to a local board of elections or counsel to the State Board. The Office of the Attorney General would respectfully ask the committee to cover the Assistant Attorneys General assigned to the Maryland State Board of Elections and the Assistant Attorney General who counsels the Baltimore City Board of Elections, since the contact information Assistant Attorneys General is made public by court filings.

Election officials should be able to carry out their duties knowing there is criminal liability for anyone who threatens them or their family simply for their role in administering an election. The Office of the Attorney General wants to ensure that our Assistant Attorneys General and local board of elections counsel, who are integral to the administration of the election process, enjoy the same protections as the other individuals already listed in House Bill 585.

For the foregoing reasons, the Office of the Attorney General requests a favorable with amendments report for House Bill 585.

cc: Governor Wes Moore
Committee Members

² *Local Election Officials Survey — April 2023*. (n.d.). Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/local-election-officials-survey-april-2023>