



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
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Chair, MAEO Legislative Committee