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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