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ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY, MARYLAND

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The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland State's Attorney's Association, and the Anne Arundel County Office of the State's Attorney, I write in support of HB0099—Criminal Law—Sexual Solicitation of a Minor Through Child Pornography-Prohibition. I am the Chief of the Special Victims Division for the Anne Arundel County State's Attorney's Office and a Leadership Team Member of the Anne Arundel County Child Advocacy Center's Multidisciplinary Team as well as a member of the Anne Arundel County Sexual Assault Response Team. I am also a member of the Maryland State's Attorneys Association's Special Victims Legislative Subcommittee. Finally, I was Chief of the Juvenile Division at the State's Attorney's Office five years prior to becoming the SVU Chief, so I have long been familiar with issues plaguing vulnerable teenage girls.

My office has prosecuted numerous cases in conjunction with trained Maryland State Troopers assigned to the Maryland Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, which is a federally funded project designed to respond to and investigate complaints of online sexual child exploitation. The Troopers work very closely with our Office, as it is typical to review the evidence prior to any ground operations. The Troopers, on their own or partnered with sister law enforcement agencies, pose as minor children who end up communicating online with sexual predators who are targeting children for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity. It is a most common practice for the online predator to encourage the purported youth to manufacture CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material) and send it to the predator. Conversely, the predator frequently sends pictures of his own genitalia to the purported minor. It is a common part of the grooming process as ultimately the predator wishes to engage in actual sexual conduct with a minor. Many times, I have seen cases where there is an attempt to trade CSAM between a predator and a law enforcement officer posing as a minor.

HB0099 would prohibit an individual from knowingly and with certain intent solicit a minor or law enforcement posing as a minor to engage in certain prohibited activities, including Sexual Solicitation of a Minor through Child Pornography. We wholeheartedly support the enactment of this bill into law. These cases are so important. We have seen instances where a later download of the predator's electronic devices reveals not only requests to trade CSAM, but cases where the predator has sent photos of his genitalia to a law enforcement officer posing as a minor. In addition, in several situations after arrest, a forensic download of a suspect's devices has located actual victims where sexual contact occurred. In one case, a predator was communicating with a real minor soliciting her to have sex while he was on bond for a Sexual Solicitation of a Minor charges.

The great Nelson Mandela once said, “The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children.” HB0099 would criminalize pedophilic behavior of those soliciting children or law enforcement posing as children for pornographic material, which would be a valuable tool for prosecutors across the State to utilize. I respectfully request a favorable report on HB0005.

Sincerely,

s/s Anastasia T. Prigge
Chief-Special Victim’s Division
Assistant State’s Attorney