

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.