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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