



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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House Bill HB585 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024
Judiciary Committee – February 6, 2024
SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2024 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic clubs with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of HB585, amended to expand the definition of "election official."

This bill makes it illegal, upon proof of requisite intent, to threaten to harm an election official or an election official's immediate family member because of the election official's role in administering the election process. To do so would be a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment not exceeding three years or a fine not exceeding \$2500, or both.

Since 2022, according to [Public Citizen](#), 15 states have adopted laws protecting election officials from threat. Maryland is not on that list. This bill will correct that gap in protection for critical, often frontline, Maryland election officials who perform vital tasks that ensure our elections are conducted fairly and with integrity. Historically, the most common poll worker pre-COVID was an older white woman ([VoA News](#)); the proportion of poll workers ages 61-70 and 71 and older [increased](#) in 2022 from 2020. (That report had no poll worker gender data.) This bill would help ensure that women, older people, and other poll workers can serve without fear. The bill will also allay anticipatory safety concerns that have contributed to what some reports suggest will be a significant shortage of election officials in the 2024 election. Further, as voters, women have the right to expect that election officials can do their job free from fear for themselves and their family members. As demonstrated in the 2020 election (most famously in Georgia, but elsewhere as well), election officials risk harassment, character defamation, and worse just for doing their job. The 2024 elections are certain to be contentious; passing this bill in the 2024 legislative session will protect these officials, contributing to a well-functioning democratic process in our state.

WDC recommends amending HB585 to expand the definition of "election official" to include volunteers lawfully positioned outside a polling location who support a particular issue or candidate and who are distributing literature or engaging prospective voters in conversation; representatives of a political party, lawfully present outside a polling location, who are providing information to voters and logistical support to their party's candidates; and challengers, watchers, and other legally authorized election observers. Although these individuals are volunteers, they are also likely targets of the kind of threats and harm identified in this bill. They deserve the same protections.

We ask for your support for HB585, with amendment, and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

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WDC Advancing Democracy in
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