

SUSAN C. LEE
Legislative District 16
Montgomery County

MAJORITY WHIP

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology,
and Biotechnology

Chair Emeritus
Maryland Legislative Asian American
and Pacific Islander Caucus

President Emeritus
Women Legislators of the
Maryland General Assembly, Inc.



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 223
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3124 · 301-858-3124
800-492-7122 Ext. 3124
Susan.Lee@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Senate Bill 205 – Public Safety – Crime of Violence – Witness Intimidation

SB 205 makes the serious offense of witness intimidation a “crime of violence” in the Public Safety Article. As this committee has discussed already this session, witness intimidation, or the act of attempting to adjust or halt the testimony of a witness within criminal or civil proceedings, is a fundamental problem that threatens the integrity, legitimacy and efficacy of our criminal justice system. There are many tweaks to the law that can assist our fight against witness intimidation, this is a simple recognition that felony witness intimidation is a crime of violence.

Felony witness intimidation is often connected to underlying violent crimes and erodes our ability to effectively deter those crimes and prosecute offenders. The intimidation of a witness is a violent act against the witness themselves and the entirety of Maryland’s judiciary.

This designation will not solve our witness intimidation problem, but it is a step in the right direction that recognizes the severity and violent nature of this crime. This committee has considered a version of this bill in the past and we have made changes to address some of the concerns raised by members last year. Most significantly, this bill only adds felony witness intimidation as a crime of violence under the Public Safety Article and holds off on adding it to the separate list of crimes of violence under the Criminal Law Article. That section would lead to potential mandatory minimums, the Public Safety Article bill deals with access to firearms. We feel this is an appropriate balance for this felony crime.

This is a straight-forward bill that seeks to tackle a major problem in our State. For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB205.