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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 1024— Criminal Law - Public Safety - Interference with Agencies and Services - Prohibitions

February 25, 2020

Sponsor Testimony

Chairman Clippinger, and members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present HB 1024 Criminal Law - Public Safety - Interference with Agencies and Services – Prohibitions. If enacted, HB 1024 would expand existing prohibitions and establishes new prohibitions to address misusing telephone facilities and equipment, computers, and computer-related materials to affect the function of a “public safety answering point” (PSAP) or a public safety agency. The bill would also prohibit a person from making a false statement to a PSAP and imposes specified penalties for violations.

This bill would update Maryland laws regarding telephone misuse of the 911 emergency system, including toughening the penalties. We need to strengthen the penalties because the reasons people make fake calls to the police have gotten far more nefarious. Their tactics include:

- *Swatting - fraudulently sending public safety officers to the houses of innocent people.*
- *Telephone Denial of Service - flooding a target's voice lines and systems, preventing legitimate calls from getting through.*
- *Distributed Denial of Service - maliciously disrupting the normal traffic of a targeted network by overwhelming the target with a flood of Internet traffic.*
- *Caller ID manipulation - pretending to be someone other than who they are, and,*
- *Sending fake/altered images, video and associate data.*

Our state laws that establish penalties in this area need some updating. Our current penalties were set in a different age, when activities like this were mostly viewed as mischief, and thus are insufficient to act as a deterrent to these kinds of attacks. This bill would raise penalties for various offenses.

- *For a false report to police, courts are currently able to sentence convicted individuals to up to three years and fine them up to \$500 fine; my bill would give them the ability to sentence bad actors up to five years and up to a \$25,000 fine.*
- *And for a new offense, disrupting a Public Safety Answering Point, those convicted could get up to 10 years in prison and up to a \$50,000 fine.*

HB 1024 would enact important reforms recommended in the Year Two Report released in December. I am proud to be a House Member of this commission along with my colleague, Delegate Susan Krebbs. We both urge a favorable report on HB1024.