



**HB1227 -- Oppose**  
**Public Safety - Task Force on Preventing and Countering**  
**Domestic Terrorism**  
**Maryland House Judiciary Committee**

Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

**Defending Rights & Dissent opposes HB1227, Public Safety - Task Force on Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism.**

Defending Rights & Dissent is a national civil liberties organization that strengthens our participatory democracy by protecting the right to political expression. On behalf of our 1,500 supporters in the state of Maryland, we submit this testimony in opposition to HB1227.

The history of the United States is replete with examples of policymakers and police using the threat of terrorism or extremism to silence dissent and harass and criminalize minority communities. From the House Un-American Activities Committee to COINTELPRO to the PATRIOT Act, policies sold as necessary tools to protect us quickly turned into tools of mass violation of civil and human rights.

Maryland has its own recent history of police abusing their authorities to violate the rights of peaceful protesters. In 2005-2006, Maryland State Police spent 14 months infiltrating the Baltimore Pledge of Resistance, the Maryland Coalition Against the Death Penalty, and other peaceful groups. The names of activists were entered into databases describing their crimes as "Terrorism-Anti Govern[ment], and "Terrorism – Anti-War Protestors".<sup>1</sup> There was never any evidence of criminal activity, yet the spying continued.

Although the “whereas” clauses of HB1227 suggest that the bill’s sponsors hope to avoid repeating this history, nothing in the enactment clauses protects Marylanders from the harms this task force could inflict.

Of particular concern is Section 1 (f)(6) which compels the task force to study and make recommendations regarding “ways to counter and prosecute online extremism while balancing First Amendment concerns.” While the term “extremism” has become a favored term for politicians across the political spectrum, it is not defined in the bill. It’s primary meaning is “the quality or state

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<sup>1</sup> Baltimore Sun, “State police spying decried,” July 19, 2008, Jonathan Bor and Gus G. Sentementes. At <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/bal-te.md.spy19jul19-story.html> and

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ACLU press release: “ACLU OF MARYLAND LAWSUIT UNCOVERS MARYLAND STATE POLICE SPYING AGAINST PEACE AND ANTI-DEATH PENALTY GROUPS” at <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-maryland-lawsuit-uncovers-maryland-state-police-spying-against-peace-and-anti>

of being extreme”,<sup>2</sup> which is absolutely protected by the First Amendment. In their day, every social justice reformer has been accused of extremism.

Also of concern is the make-up of the task force. Again, despite the protestations of the “whereas” clauses which purport to protect marginalized communities and freedom of speech, assembly, and religion, the members of the task force as designed by this bill are unlikely to diligently protect the communities and activities that are historically targeted. The representation of civil rights groups is too small, and there are not members who have expertise in civil liberties.

**HB1227 is well-meaning, but lays the groundwork for Maryland to adopt policies and practices that will undermine civil and human rights in the state. Defending Rights & Dissent urges the Judiciary Committee to reject HB1227.**

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<sup>2</sup> Merriam-Webster, at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extremism>