

HB 1037: Election Law - Websites - Reporting of Political Censorship

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Good afternoon members of the hearing,

Political censorship, in becoming a more frequent and strategic method, has become fueled by partisanship and unethically benefits those left unsilenced. Establishment of measures and regulations of such behavior, imposed by the state of Maryland and affecting those websites with high user traffic, is most necessary in striking down a newfound precedent which silences dissent of any kind; this explicitly includes hiding, banning, or censoring political speech relative to a certain candidate, political party, or question on the ballot of an election.

In the interest of transparency of the actions and intent of covered websites, this bill would allow for the nature of censorship, and all factors to be revealed to show the true intention of the action. Platforms such as Facebook and Google have been especially receptive to funding and sponsorship that they have received. This often hinders their algorithms to, rather than produce most relevant results to a search, display most generously funded sources. If you have searched recently for any public figure, it is likely that rather than their core information, you may find controversy and outspoken opposition to them. This is an obvious example of politically motivated censorship, for either the gain of a candidate or political party, or to ensure success in an election. Facebook exemplifies similar behavior to this (as one of the many covered websites), in choosing to display advertisements, which you all may know, are placed after every fourth post, leaving frequent opportunity for politically motivated advertising.

To anyone offering significant opposition to the merits of this bill, I ask you to consider yourselves, consider our First Amendment of the United States Constitution, and consider reading George Orwell's *1984*, as the precedents of censorship are egregious in principle and even more dangerous in practice. The notion that an individual should not be allowed a platform for speech on the basis of disagreement is fundamentally ridiculous. This type of disagreement has driven a division in this country and in the state of Maryland, which will be left to worsen unless those who disagree can remain civil, and unless partisanship becomes mutually exclusive with decency. We intend that the threat of a civil penalty in an amount up to \$50,000 per unreported incident will deter future acts of censorship, and require administration of such websites to consider further those precedents which they continue to perpetuate. A report on the basis of political censorship, drafted under a website's own discretion, will be an acknowledgement of those practices which are unfairly exploited.

I sincerely hope that you all have been especially receptive of my testimony before you. As a nation, as a state, and as individuals, our willingness to work together on such issues as these to allow for the equal opportunity to speak and to be heard is a fundamental right which should apply to all individuals. Without such regulations and penalties, a covered website's ability to impose censorship in a strictly partisan and/or destructive fashion will and can become a political weapon, more-so than it already has. Do not stand for this precedent, do not stand for unregulated censorship, do not allow for such websites to become gatekeepers of thought. I offer full support for HB 1037 to allow for the requirement of a report for political censorship by these large opinion platforms.