



J. Howard Beard Health Services Building  
3 Harry S. Truman Parkway  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
Phone: 410-222-7095 Fax: 410-222-7294  
Maryland Relay (TTY): 711  
www.aahealth.org

**Nilesh Kalyanaraman, MD, FACP**  
**Health Officer**

**2022 SESSION**  
**Written Testimony**

**BILL NO:** SB0298  
**COMMITTEE:** Judicial Proceedings  
**POSITION:** Letter of Support  
**TITLE:** Criminal Law- Threat Against a Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member

**BILL ANALYSIS:**

SB0298 prohibits a person from threatening a public health official or hospital staff member with the intent of hindering them from performing official duties and imposes penalties for doing so. Any person who violates this act is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to imprisonment of up to 90 days and a fine of up to \$500, or both.

**POSITION RATIONALE:**

In March 2020, public health officials across the Country were faced with the most difficult public health crisis we have ever experienced, due to COVID-19. As Health Officer of Anne Arundel County, we had to work fast, make huge decisions and follow the public health knowledge and science we were taught and read. While fighting the virus we were also learning about it in real time and due to that policies and measures were changing as we were learning what was the most effective. Over time, people have grown tired of the pandemic and have acted out against certain policies or measures they do not believe in. We as Health Officers have been working in the best interest of communities trying to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to keep our hospitalizations and deaths down. The Anne Arundel County Health Department fully supports SB0298.

Local Health Department staff are hired for their knowledge, expertise, training, and the ability to effectively run a health department and keep their communities healthy. Our recommendations for COVID-19 are based on science, evidence, and best practices, and are not about controlling people. We realize our decisions will not please everyone but at the same time we need to do what we can to save

lives. With that said, these measures caused some people to lash out, harass, and intimidate not only myself, but some of our staff. While we believe our citizens have the right to share their feelings, crossing the line to threatening behaviors and trying to impede our abilities to do our jobs effectively is unacceptable.

I personally have been the subject of intimidation, been intimidated in public, and needed police security at one point. Our staff have faced intimidation in carrying out their jobs in the community.

Other Maryland health officers have received threatening letters from the public, been harassed, and threatened through social media. There are currently no consequences to the offenders as Maryland is one of a few states that lacks protections specific to public health officials and staff. There is no deterrent to those that are lashing out and the threats continue and are worsening especially with the Omicron wave, as people have pandemic fatigue. However, this is not an excuse for threatening and harassing behaviors.

We ask that you please pass this bill to offer Local Health Departments more protection. The harassment has been detrimental to us doing our jobs effectively. We also need and want our staff to feel completely safe while working at Local Health Departments.