

SB0054 Anne Arundel County – Marriage License Applications and Ceremonies
Judicial Proceedings Committee – January 26, 2022
Sponsor: Senator Edward Reilly
Position: Support

Testimony of Scott Poyer, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Anne Arundel County

Thank you Chairman Smith and members of the committee for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 54. For the record, my name is Scott Poyer and I am the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County. My testimony today is not on behalf of the Maryland Judiciary. I am here representing myself as the elected official who is responsible for issuing marriage licenses and performing marriage ceremonies in Anne Arundel County.

I support SB 54 because it offers marriage applicants more flexibility than the current system which requires everything to be in-person. As you may be aware, during the COVID state of emergency, Governor Hogan temporarily granted this authority in Executive Order NO. 2020-05-13-02, Dated May 13, 2020. My understanding is that SB 54 seeks to make this authority permanent.

The temporary authority granted by the Governor has since expired, but during the time it was in effect my office conducted over 500 online marriage ceremonies and processed thousands of marriage applications. I would consider this real world test a success. At the beginning of the state of emergency it allowed some couples to get married who would not otherwise have been able to do so. And while it was in effect it remained a popular option even after in-person ceremonies also became available. There are some applicants who prefer in-person and there are others who prefer online.

Some people may prefer the online option because you can have an unlimited number of guests, who do not need to travel long distances to attend. We have performed online ceremonies with guests on three continents who would not otherwise have been able to participate. We

performed a ceremony for people who could not leave their house due to quarantine. We performed a ceremony for a couple in the hospital who just had a baby. And we performed several ceremonies for service members about to be deployed.

One issue that concerned me when we developed our process for conducting online weddings was whether it would increase the potential for child trafficking. However, we built checks into the process, such as requiring signed affidavits, photo ID, and dialog with applicants before the ceremony to ensure both are eligible to marry and that neither appears to be coerced. My opinion is that the security of the online option is approximately equal to the in-person option.

Because of the increased flexibility offered by online ceremonies and an approximately equivalent level of security compared to existing in-person ceremonies, I support SB 54. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.