



Bill No: **HB0148** (SB0328)

Title: **Criminal Law - Stalking - Definition**

Committee: **Judiciary**

Hearing Date: **1/27/22**

Position: **SUPPORT**

Business and Professional Women of Maryland (BPW/MD) is a non-partisan, non-sectarian, member-supported nonprofit focused on eliminating gender discrimination in employment, the principle of equal pay, and the need for a comprehensive equal rights amendment. Our mission is advanced through legislative advocacy, professional development, and public education. Founded in 1929, BPW/MD has advocated for workplace equality legislation at both the national and state level.

As an association of pro-equality citizens and a partner of pro-equality organizations, BPW/MD fully supports amending Criminal Law – Section 3–802, Annotated Code of Maryland, to include electronic communication and tracking. Electronic stalking is an increasing problem because it is easy and low-risk for perpetrators, who rarely face consequences.¹ Electronic communications, such as private **and** public social media messages, emails, and texts, and tracking software or devices, which secretly monitor a target’s private life, can severely impact women’s financial and career success.

Research has shown women who suffer electronic harassment widely experience financial and/or productivity losses, reputational harm, or the inability to network online, maintain a professional presence online, and crowdfund.² Studies of women in specific fields, such as science and journalism, found that electronic communication and stalking severely impact professional performance, forcing women to withdraw from certain topics or forums, disengage from audiences and peers, and otherwise alter their work.^{3 4}

Anecdotally, some authorities have suggested that women simply “take a break” from the Internet to escape electronic stalking.⁵ However, the Internet is a necessity for employment, professional development, career advancement, education, and networking, particularly during the ongoing COVID pandemic. Therefore, with the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members, BPW/MD urges the Judiciary Committee to report favorably on House Bill 148.

¹ Hamby, S., Blount, Z., Smith, A., Jones, L., Mitchell, K., & Taylor, E. (2018). Digital poly-victimization: The increasing importance of online crime and harassment to the burden of victimization. *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation*, 19(3).

² Jane, E. A. (2018). Gendered cyberhate as workplace harassment and economic vandalism. *Feminist Media Studies* 18(4).

³ Chen, G. M., Pain, P., Chen, V. Y., Mekelburg, M., Springer, N., & Troger, F. (2018, April 7). ‘You really have to have a thick skin’: A cross-cultural perspective on how online harassment influences female journalists. *Journalism*.

⁴ Veletsianos, G., Houlden, S., Hodson, J., & Gosse, C. (2018). Women scholars’ experiences with online harassment and abuse: Self-protection, resistance, acceptance, and self-blame. *New Media & Society*, 20(12).

⁵ Jane, E. A. (2020). Online abuse and harassment. In K. Ross (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.