



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: Senate Bill 540 – Human Relations - Civil Rights Enforcement - Powers of the Attorney General

SPONSOR: The President (By Request - Office of the Attorney General)

HEARING DATE: February 28, 2023

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 540 – Human Relations - Civil Rights Enforcement - Powers of the Attorney General**, which generally (1) grants the Attorney General the power to investigate, prosecute, and remediate any conduct that constitutes a civil rights violation; (2) establishes related procedures and specified remedies for violations; (3) requires coordination with the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR); and (4) establishes the Civil Rights Enforcement Fund.

During the civil rights movement of the 1940s through the 1960s, the United States government enacted many anti-discrimination laws, with the aim of protecting individuals from being treated differently due to their race/color, ethnicity, and other protected characteristics. Some of those laws that were enacted to prevent discrimination were the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Age Discrimination in Employment Act and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. More recent anti-discrimination laws enacted were the Title I and Title V of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008.

We are Prince George's Proud that in 1972 when the County transitioned to the current form of governance, the first law passed by the County Council was Division 12, which is the County's anti-discrimination law, and establishment of the Office of Human Rights. The Office of Human Rights enforces anti-discrimination laws to include Federal anti-discrimination laws in employment as a result of a work-share agreement with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The Office of Human Rights' sister-agency, Maryland Commission on Civil Rights

(MCCR), like the Office of Human Rights investigates complaints of discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. In addition, the Office of Human Rights also investigates discrimination complaints in education, law enforcement, and commercial and residential real estate transactions.

As both the Office of Human Rights and the MCCR protect individuals from discrimination, the enactment of SB 540 will allow the State Attorney General to investigate, prosecute, and remediate on behalf of residents of the State any conduct that constitutes a civil rights violation. SB 540 will not only permit the Attorney General to address structural discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodation, but will also establish the Civil Rights Enforcement Fund, which will provide necessary funds to the Office of the Attorney General and the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights to continue educating residents/businesses in the State, to include Prince George's County.

Despite numerous civil rights and anti-discrimination laws passed over the years, there is a rise of hate and discrimination incidents in the United States of America. For example, anti-Asian hate crimes increased 339% last year compared to the previous year and Black Americans remained the most targeted group across most cities. ¹ There is therefore a need for increased vigilance and structure to combat this rise in civil rights violations.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 540** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.

¹ Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism