



TESTIMONY FOR SB0978
Election Law - Synthetic Media - Disclosure and Regulation

Bill Sponsor: Senator Hester

Committee: Ways and Means

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0978 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

What is real anymore? With the advent of electronic media and AI, it is too hard to tell if what you are seeing is real or artificially generated, or even spliced together from something that was real. We form opinions based on what we see, and we always presume that what we are seeing is the real thing. This can be dangerous in the best of times, since synthetically generated images, video and audio are designed to produce a reaction, including anger and fear and some people act on those emotions.

During election season, the issue of synthetic media becomes even more dangerous. We are voting based on what we see and hear, so it is changing the playing field for any given candidate.

This bill, if enacted, would require any entity that publishes synthetic media to clearly mark it as such. This will include all forms of media – still images, audio and video. Violation of this procedure would incur a civil penalty of up to \$10,000 for a violation within 5 years of a previous violation; \$5,000 for any violation intended to cause violence or physical harm; and \$1,000 for any other violation. Persons who are harmed by synthetic media would be able to sue based on the lack of disclaimer on the media.

This is a great step forward to ensuring that we can believe what we see and hear. We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.