



House Bill 333

Election Law – Election Disinformation and Improper Influence Related to Voting

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee

Date: March 27, 2024

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 333. This bill provides necessary and timely policy changes to protect election integrity and public servants charged with ensuring fair, open, and transparent elections.

Counties administer and fund elections at the local level, overseeing polling places and coordinating poll workers every two years. New and evolving threats from hostile actors and defending against a constant stream of disinformation are top of mind for county leaders and state and local election officials alike.

Election disinformation — including lies about the voting process and election workers — erodes public trust and suppresses voter turnout. By requiring large social media platforms to detect and report election disinformation to the State Board of Elections, HB 333 promotes transparency and takes an important step toward protecting the integrity of elections in Maryland.

Maryland law protects state and local elected officials who perform their duties – making it a crime for residents to threaten, intimidate, or otherwise impede their public responsibilities. However, unlike some states, Maryland does not extend these protections to other non-elected officials who perform administrative or oversight roles but may suffer the same potentially dangerous feedback from angry residents.

It is critical that those on the front lines of our democracy—election workers and officials—can safely and effectively do their jobs. HB 333 clarifies and bolsters protections for election officials and voters alike, ensuring that voters can cast ballots and that elections are freely and fairly administered, and targeting the spread of false information that may otherwise trigger animus toward elections staff.

According to a 2022 Brennan Center for Justice poll, election officials are under attack and leaving their jobs. More than half of the respondents expressed concerns about the safety of their colleagues. Nearly one in three knew at least one colleague who quit their job partly or entirely because of safety concerns, increased threats, or intimidation.

HB 333 extends reasonable and necessary protections for election integrity and local election workers and officials. Accordingly, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 333.