

# **2024-02-20 IRGA Written Testimony in Support of MD**

Uploaded by: Alexander Tischenko

Position: FAV

# Institute *for* Responsive Government Action

The Institute for Responsive Government Action respectfully submits the following testimony in support of Senate Bill 480, the Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024:

Senate Bill 480 would **provide necessary protections for election officials who face unprecedented threats while performing their essential duties of administering free and fair elections**. As such, the Institute for Responsive Government Action wholeheartedly supports the passage of Senate Bill 480.

In the past two years, **numerous states across the political spectrum have passed laws increasing protections for election workers against threats, intimidation, and other risks** that may occur in the course of their duties.

Like House Bill 585, these laws often include provisions that make it a crime to threaten, intimidate, or harass an election official based on their role in administering the elections process.

This includes states like Oklahoma (SB 481), Arkansas (HB 1457), Minnesota (HF 3), New Mexico (SB 43), Nevada (SB 406), Colorado (HB 1273), and Vermont (S 265).

**Threats to election officials not only harm election officials themselves, but also negatively impact the voter experience and the smooth running of elections.**

National surveys of elections officials report that **threats and harassment contribute to turnover of experienced elections administrators**. Similarly, threats and harassment make it **more difficult to recruit pollworkers** and other temporary election workers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Brennan Center for Justice, [Poll of Election Officials Shows High Turnover Amid Safety Threats and Political Interference](#) (2023).

With this bill, the Maryland General Assembly has the opportunity to protect the public servants responsible for ensuring that elections remain free and fair.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alex Tischenko  
Senior Policy Advisor  
Institute for Responsive Government Action

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*The Institute for Responsive Government Action is dedicated to ensuring state and federal governments work effectively for the very people they serve. Responsive Gov Action works to provide legislative advice and action, polling, and testimony in order to find practical policy solutions that make government systems more efficient, accessible, and responsive for everyday Americans.*

**WDC Testimony\_SB480\_FINAL.pdf**

Uploaded by: Beth Tomasello

Position: FAV



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

[www.womensdemocraticclub.org](http://www.womensdemocraticclub.org)

**Senate Bill SB480 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024**  
**Education, Energy & Environment Committee – February 21, 2024**  
**SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2024 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic clubs with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

**WDC urges the passage of SB480, amended to expand the definition of "election official."**

This bill makes it illegal, upon proof of requisite intent, to threaten to harm an election official or an election official's immediate family member because of the election official's role in administering the election process. To do so would be a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment not exceeding three years or a fine not exceeding \$2500, or both.

Since 2022, according to [Public Citizen](#), 15 states have adopted laws protecting election officials from threat. Maryland is not on that list. This bill will correct that gap in protection for critical, often frontline, Maryland election officials who perform vital tasks that ensure our elections are conducted fairly and with integrity. Historically, the most common poll worker pre-COVID was an older white woman ([VoA News](#)); the proportion of poll workers ages 61-70 and 71 and older [increased](#) in 2022 from 2020. (That report had no poll worker gender data.) This bill would help ensure that women, older people, and other poll workers can serve without fear. The bill will also allay anticipatory safety concerns that have contributed to what some reports suggest will be a significant shortage of election officials in the 2024 election. Further, as voters, women have the right to expect that election officials can do their job free from fear for themselves and their family members. As demonstrated in the 2020 election (most famously in Georgia, but elsewhere as well), election officials risk harassment, character defamation, and worse just for doing their job. The 2024 elections are certain to be contentious; passing this bill in the 2024 legislative session will protect these officials, contributing to a well-functioning democratic process in our state.

**WDC recommends amending SB480 to expand the definition of "election official"** to include volunteers lawfully positioned outside a polling location who support a particular issue or candidate and who are distributing literature or engaging prospective voters in conversation; representatives of a political party, lawfully present outside a polling location, who are providing information to voters and logistical support to their party's candidates; and challengers, watchers, and other legally authorized election observers. Although these individuals are volunteers, they are also likely targets of the kind of threats and harm identified in this bill. They deserve the same protections.

**We ask for your support for SB480, with amendment, and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.**

Tazeen Ahmad  
WDC President

Ginna Ingram  
WDC Advancing Democracy in  
Maryland Subcommittee

Cynthia Rubenstein  
Chair, WDC Advocacy

# **Testimony - SB 480 - Protecting Election Officials**

Uploaded by: Brandon Butler

Position: FAV



The Honorable Brian Feldman  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

The Center for Election Science, a leader in the implementation of approval voting, would like to express its support for **Senate Bill 480: Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024**. The measure protects the democratic process while simultaneously protecting elections officials. For that, we thank the Moore Administration for proposing this measure.

Founded in 2011, the Center for Election Science (CES) is a national, nonpartisan nonprofit focused on voting reform. CES seeks to empower people with voting methods that strengthen democracy. By implementing approval voting, which allows voters to pick all of the candidates they like on their ballot, we believe citizens will be able to more clearly and effectively express their support for candidates who truly represent their communities.

As a national nonprofit, we have worked with hundreds of elections officials throughout the country. Their difficult work to ensure that elections are fair for all qualified voters is often thankless. This measure ensures that elections officials are free from harassment and threats of violence.

We look forward to continuing our work in Maryland with elections officials and the Maryland Association of Elections Officials, urge a favorable report of this bill.

For more information on the Center for Election Science's work on approval voting, please visit: [electionscience.org](https://electionscience.org).

Sincerely,

Nina Taylor, MA  
Chief Executive Officer  
Center for Election Science  
[Nina@electionscience.org](mailto:Nina@electionscience.org)

Michael Piel  
Director of Philanthropy  
Center for Election Science  
[Mike@electionscience.org](mailto:Mike@electionscience.org)

# **SB0480\_Protecting\_Election\_Officials\_Act\_of\_2024\_M**

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV





## TESTIMONY FOR SB0480 Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024

**Bill Sponsor:** Senator Ferguson, President

**Committee:** Education, Energy, and the Environment

**Organization Submitting:** Maryland Legislative Coalition

**Person Submitting:** Aileen Alex, co-chair

**Position:** FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0480 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.

As priority of Governor Moore's, this bill will address the epidemic of threats and harassment targeting election officials that pose a fundamental risk to Maryland's ability to conduct free and fair elections. We cannot be dependent on Congress to pass such legislation nationally.

SB0480 is crucial to safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process in Maryland starting with the national election in November. As we approach this critical period, both domestic and international terrorists continue to target U.S. elections, seeking to achieve a tyranny of the minority.

Of course, the Maryland Legislative Coalition wants free and fair elections. In addition to helping to get great bills like SB0480 passed, our mission is to inform voters about such legislation and their legislators. This is our way of getting informed voters to the polls. We do not want our efforts undone by allowing our election officials to be intimidated and threatened.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.

**GMOM\_SB480\_022124.pdf**

Uploaded by: Charlie Cooper

Position: FAV



Get Money Out – Maryland

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Board of Directors

Charlie Cooper, President  
Doug Miller, Vice President  
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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 480  
PROTECTING ELECTION OFFICIALS ACT OF 2024**

**February 21, 2024**

**By Charlie Cooper, President**

Get Money Out–Maryland is an all-volunteer force seeking to get big money out of our political system and make elections fairer. We believe that every citizen should have equal access to the ballot as a voter or as a candidate. District lines should be fair to every voter, regardless of race, ethnicity, or party affiliation. The corruption of big money in politics must be eliminated, and the disproportionate influence of concentrated wealth reduced.

We strongly support Senate Bill 480 to counter the disturbing trend of threats against election officials and even against citizen election judges. We are enormously proud of the election workforce across the nation. Regardless of party affiliation, they almost unanimously withstood intense pressure to mischaracterize election results. Fair election laws and rules held because of their courage.

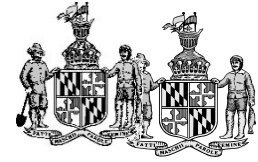
Nevertheless, misinformation continues to swirl. News reports have documented a drastically higher level of threats against election officials, workers, and citizen election judges. We are concerned that another increase in this kind of activity could cause even more vacancies in these vital positions. Passing this legislation is a sensible step to give the election workforce a sense of security.

Get Money Out – Maryland is pleased to see that this bill has bipartisan support. We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 480.

# **Testimony - SB480 - Protecting Election Officials**

Uploaded by: Eric Luedtke

Position: FAV



**WES MOORE**  
GOVERNOR

STATE HOUSE  
100 STATE CIRCLE  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND  
21401-1925

February 21, 2024

**SUPPORT for SB 480 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024**

Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and honorable members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 480 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024.

This legislation is intended to stop the rising number of threats and harassment targeting election officials, which poses a fundamental threat to our State's ability to conduct free and fair elections. It is a "good government" bill that seeks to protect all election officials, regardless of party. These everyday heroes are on the front lines, making elections happen – and this bill says to election officials throughout our State that their work is essential, that they are valued, and that their safety matters.

Current law prohibits the obstruction of official electoral activities and interference with an election official in the performance of their official duties – but does not protect an election official who is targeted because of their role in administering the election process. SB 480 would create a new misdemeanor charge in the Election Law Article for threats against election officials or their families. Upon conviction, a person who violates the Act would be subject to imprisonment (not exceeding three years), a fine (not exceeding \$2500), or both – which corresponds with the penalties for threatening a State or local official.

Because of the hostility that election officials now face, many are reconsidering their roles within the electoral process. According to a recent Brennan Center poll of election officials across the country, nearly one in three election officials have been harassed, abused, or threatened because of their job; 45% of election officials say they fear for the safety of their colleagues; and 20% of local administrators say they are likely to leave their jobs before the 2024 Presidential Election (Brennan Center for Justice, 2023.)

This turnover rate of election officials is concerning and has been referred to as a "brain drain." Staffing can be an issue at any time, but given the current political climate, greater numbers of election officials are resigning or retiring – taking their experience and institutional knowledge with them. In knowing that election officials are protected under this legislation, we hope that SB 480 also will serve to help recruit and retain the invaluable service of these dedicated and hard working public servants.

On behalf of the Moore-Miller Administration, I urge a favorable report on SB 480.

Yours in Service,

Eric Luedtke  
Chief Legislative Officer

# **Election Workers\_CCAN\_Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ernesto Villasenor

Position: FAV

**Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment**

**Testimony: Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024**

**Position: Favorable**

**Hearing Date: February 21, 2024**

**Ernesto Villasenor, Jr., J.D**

**Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund**

**On behalf of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund, we stand in strong support of the Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024 (HB 0585/SB 0480),** which addresses threats against election officials in Maryland. Safeguarding these officials and their families from harm is crucial for maintaining the integrity of our democratic process, a principle our organization deeply values.

Senate Bill 480 aims to deter and penalize individuals who knowingly and willfully make threats to harm election officials or their immediate family members. This bill covers a wide spectrum of threats, whether oral, electronic, or written, regardless of whether they are signed or anonymous. By explicitly prohibiting such behavior and outlining consequences for offenders, this legislation sends a clear message that intimidation and violence against those entrusted with administering elections will not be tolerated.

Election officials serve as guardians of our democratic principles, entrusted with the solemn duty of upholding the integrity and fairness of our electoral system. Their diligent work behind the scenes ensures that every vote counts and accurately reflects the voice of the people in election outcomes. Without their dedication and vigilance, the very foundation of our democracy would be at risk.

It is essential that these public servants can carry out their duties without fear of retaliation or harm. Threats and intimidation not only endanger the individuals targeted but also undermine the entire electoral process, casting doubt and eroding public trust in its integrity.

Senate Bill 480 represents a critical measure in safeguarding the well-being of election officials and their families. By establishing clear prohibitions and penalties for those who attempt to intimidate or harm these dedicated individuals, Maryland can send a strong message that such actions will not be tolerated. This proactive approach not only protects those who serve our democracy but also upholds the fundamental principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability that underpin our electoral system.



By supporting Senate Bill 480, Maryland demonstrates its commitment to preserving the sanctity of our elections and ensuring that those who devote themselves to this essential public service can do so without fear or interference. This legislation reaffirms our collective belief in the importance of safeguarding the democratic process and underscores our shared responsibility to defend the institutions that protect our freedoms and rights.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 480 and its efforts to protect election officials and their families. Thank you for your attention to this vital issue.

**CONTACT**  
Ernesto Villaseñor, Jr., JD | Policy Manager  
Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund  
[ernesto@chesapeakeclimate.org](mailto:ernesto@chesapeakeclimate.org)  
310-465-6943





# **SB480\_StateBoardofElections\_Support\_JaredDeMarinis**

Uploaded by: Jared DeMarinis

Position: FAV



# Maryland State Board of Elections

## **SB480 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024 - FAVORABLE**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the State Board of Elections, I am pleased to support Senate Bill 480 to establish penalties in the Election Law Article for threats and harassment against election officials.

As the members of this committee are well aware, there has been a great deal of national attention to threats and harassment against election officials. Some of our colleagues in other states and their families have had to arrange for 24-hour police protection, have had their spouses and children targeted, had to leave their homes or had their property vandalized.

As public officials, of course, we are used to some amount of discontent from candidates and voters who are not happy with the outcome of an election. But freedom of speech cannot be allowed to cross the line into making personal threats against the life or safety of an election official, a poll worker, or a member of their family.

We were fortunate in the State of Maryland that we did not experience the same extent of the threats in the last presidential election as some of our colleagues in swing states. But we should not wait to take action until we have local news coverage here in Maryland of a child or a spouse of an election official or a poll worker being threatened because of that official's role in the election process.

This is an important bill to support our staff, of course, but I want to emphasize that we also need this bill to help us recruit and retain Election Judges. The General Assembly demonstrated its commitment to Election Judges by passing legislation last year to increase their pay. By supporting this legislation, you will further demonstrate your support for the Election Judges who serve their community at the polls by making it possible for us to assure them that we are doing everything we can to protect them against threats and harassment.

Thank you and we look forward to your favorable passage of this bill.

Jared DeMarinis, State Administrator of Elections

*Contacts:*

*Jared DeMarinis, State Administrator of Elections  
410-269-2853 or [jared.demarinis@maryland.gov](mailto:jared.demarinis@maryland.gov)*

*Jennifer McLaughlin, Policy Analyst and Director of Mail-In Voting  
410-269-2849 or [jennifer.mclaughlin@maryland.gov](mailto:jennifer.mclaughlin@maryland.gov)*

**JARED DeMARINIS, STATE ADMINISTRATOR  
STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS**

**EEE 2/21/2024**

# **SB 480 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024**

Uploaded by: Joanne Antoine

Position: FAV

**February 21, 2024**

**Testimony on SB 480  
Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024  
Education, Energy, and the Environment**

**Position:** Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 480 which would create a new and reasonable misdemeanor charge for those who threaten state and local election officials or their families.

Election officials throughout Maryland and the nation are demanding that protections be put in place as they prepare for upcoming elections. Many of them have been the target of ongoing threats and harassment, with some even leaving their roles out of fear. A poll by the Brennan Center found that [45% of local election officials](#) said they fear for the safety of their colleagues. Nearly one in three election officials have been harassed, abused, or threatened because of their job, and more than one in five are concerned about being physically assaulted on the job in future elections.

As a result, roughly 11% of election officials have said they are very or somewhat likely to resign before the November 2024 election – a situation we must prevent from happening here in Maryland.

In response to these unfortunate events and out of concern for losing much of the technical expertise and knowledge needed to administer our election – complex processes that new staffers can't quickly learn, fifteen state legislatures have taken action by passing urgent reforms to protect their election workers. Maryland must do the same to ensure those essential to our democracy feel confident that they can run our elections in a safe environment.

SB 480 aims to address this by establishing a misdemeanor charge that will hopefully function as a deterrent to prevent future extremists from targeting our state and local election officials, including election judges.

With the 2024 elections right around the corner, it is critical the Maryland General Assembly work in a bipartisan manner to pass this legislation – sending a message that it will do all it can to ensure election officials throughout the state are protected as they work to administer and assist voters heading to the polls.

Protecting for our election officials will ensure that Maryland elections continue to be safe, secure, and accessible. For those reasons, we urge a favorable report.

# **SB480- Election Worker Protections 2024.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: John Michael Gudger

Position: FAV



# Maryland Association of Election Officials

## Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

February 21, 2024

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

### **SB480 – Support**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Committee Members:

My name is John Michael Gudger, chair of the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) Legislative Committee. I am writing on behalf of MAEO to voice support for the Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024. This legislation is not only timely but essential in ensuring the safety and security of those at the forefront of preserving our democratic processes.

Election officials, from state administrators to local election judges, dedicate themselves to the administration of fair, free, and transparent elections. Their commitment to democracy requires them to work long hours under intense scrutiny and, increasingly, under the cloud of personal risk. The escalation of threats against election officials and their families is not only deeply concerning but also an affront to the principles of democracy that we all hold dear.

Senate Bill 480 addresses these concerns head-on by establishing clear legal protections for election officials and their immediate family members. By making it a misdemeanor to knowingly and willfully threaten to harm an election official because of their role in administering elections, this bill sends a clear message that Maryland stands firmly against intimidation and violence.

The definitions provided in the bill for terms such as "election official," "harm," "immediate family member," and "threat" are comprehensive and inclusive, ensuring that all forms of intimidation, whether verbal, electronic, or written, are covered. This breadth is crucial, given the variety of ways in which threats can be communicated in our digital age.

Furthermore, the penalties outlined in the bill, including imprisonment of up to three years or a fine not exceeding \$2,500 or both, serve as a significant deterrent against such reprehensible behavior. It is imperative that we establish strong legal repercussions to protect those who serve our democracy from any form of intimidation or harm.

The Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024 is a necessary step in safeguarding our election officials and their families. It provides much-needed legal protections and underscores our collective commitment to maintaining the integrity of our elections. As representatives of the Local Board of Elections, we witness firsthand the dedication of our officials and the challenges they face. Ensuring their safety is not only a matter of personal security but also of public trust in our electoral system.

We urge the committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 480 and thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

John Michael Gudger  
johnmichael.gudger@maryland.gov  
Chair, MAEO Legislative Committee

## **2-21 NS\_LTK SB 480 - Elections - Protect Election**

Uploaded by: Nikki Tyree

Position: FAV



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**TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**

**SB 480 Protecting Election Officials Act 2024**

**POSITION: Favorable**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President**

**DATE: February 21, 2024**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization with a mission to educate all voters and expand civic involvement. LWVMD's position on Voting Rights and Election Administration calls for an election system that is representative, feasible to implement and increases voter participation. Protecting elections officials is a crucial element of preserving the democratic system.

As Maryland, and much of the country, saw during the elections of 2022 it is becoming more and more common for election officials to experience harm, harassment, bullying, threats, and in rare cases doxxing. SB480 would aid our elections system by giving officials recourse if they are in danger. The passage of this bill could also persuade those who are contemplating becoming judges that they will be protected.

Election judges typically work a 15- or 16-hour day on Election Day, plus mandatory participation at polling places set up the night before, which can take another two hours, as well as hours during Early Voting. Officials also go through extensive training that is unpaid.

Many election judges sign up because they feel a strong commitment to civic duty and enjoy helping voters. However, recruiting enough judges has become increasingly challenging for local election boards. Finding, training, and retaining enough people to staff polling places is not easy. This year the need for judges is even greater. In 2020 and again in 2022 Maryland has seen shortages in needed judges. LWVMD is hopeful that an increase in pay for returning judges will inspire many to reprise the role, but safety remains a top concern. SB480 addresses these concerns.

**The League of Women Voters urges a favorable report on SB 480.**



# **Testimony - SB 480 - Protecting Election Officials**

Uploaded by: Nina Taylor

Position: FAV



The Honorable Brian Feldman  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

The Center for Election Science, a leader in the implementation of approval voting, would like to express its support for **Senate Bill 480: Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024**. The measure protects the democratic process while simultaneously protecting elections officials. For that, we thank the Moore Administration for proposing this measure.

Founded in 2011, the Center for Election Science (CES) is a national, nonpartisan nonprofit focused on voting reform. CES seeks to empower people with voting methods that strengthen democracy. By implementing approval voting, which allows voters to pick all of the candidates they like on their ballot, we believe citizens will be able to more clearly and effectively express their support for candidates who truly represent their communities.

As a national nonprofit, we have worked with hundreds of elections officials throughout the country. Their difficult work to ensure that elections are fair for all qualified voters is often thankless. This measure ensures that elections officials are free from harassment and threats of violence.

We look forward to continuing our work in Maryland with elections officials and the Maryland Association of Elections Officials, urge a favorable report of this bill.

For more information on the Center for Election Science's work on approval voting, please visit: [electionscience.org](https://electionscience.org).

Sincerely,

Nina Taylor, MA  
Chief Executive Officer  
Center for Election Science  
[Nina@electionscience.org](mailto:Nina@electionscience.org)

Michael Piel  
Director of Philanthropy  
Center for Election Science  
[Mike@electionscience.org](mailto:Mike@electionscience.org)

**MAEO SB 480.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ruie Lavoie

Position: FAV



# Maryland Association of Election Officials

Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

Thank you, Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Committee Members:

My name is Ruie Lavoie, Vice President of the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) and the Director of the Baltimore County Board of Elections. On behalf of MAEO, I am honored to testify in support of the Protecting Election Officials Act.

This legislation is not only timely but personal for me. During the 2022 election cycle, I was threatened and having had that experience gives me a unique perspective. I now place the safety of my staff, election judges, my Board and our families first when establishing policy and procedures in my office.

After receiving the threat, I witnessed firsthand and was overwhelmingly thankful for the protection from my County, the FBI and Homeland Security. Receiving a threat has a lasting effect. This legislation will work in concert to help stop threats and ensure the safety and security of those at the forefront of preserving our democratic processes.

Election officials, from administrators to election judges, dedicate themselves to the administration of fair, free, accurate and transparent elections. We are struggling with recruitment, not only hiring election judges but filling vacancies in our election offices. We work long hours, under intense scrutiny and increasingly, under the cloud of personal risk. The escalation of threats against us is deeply concerning and an affront to the principles of democracy that we all hold dear.

Senate Bill 480 addresses these concerns head-on, it establishes legal protections, sending a clear message that Maryland stands firmly against intimidation and violence, protecting those who serve our democracy from any form of intimidation or harm.

This legislation will help to safeguard election officials, providing legal protections which underscores our collective commitment to maintaining the integrity of the election process and public trust in our electoral system.

We appreciate the Governor's support of this Bill and ask the Committee to favorably report Senate Bill 480.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical matter.

*Ruie Marie Lavoie*

Director, Baltimore County Board of Elections

Vice President, Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO)

Local Leadership Council Executive Committee, US Election Assistance Commission

Office: [410-887-5700](tel:410-887-5700) | [rlavoie@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:rlavoie@baltimorecountymd.gov)

5 Crossing Way, Owings Mills, Maryland 21117

# **SB480WrittenSupport -FINAL.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sarah David

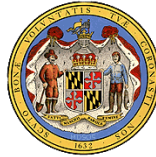
Position: FAV

CHARLTON T. HOWARD III  
State Prosecutor

SARAH R. DAVID  
Deputy State Prosecutor

LETAM DUSON  
ABIGAIL E. TICSE  
MARY W. SETZER  
CASSIE MATHIAS  
Senior Assistant State Prosecutors

## STATE OF MARYLAND



## OFFICE OF THE STATE PROSECUTOR

Hampton Plaza  
Suite 410  
300 East Joppa Road  
Towson, MD 21286-3152  
Telephone (410) 321-4067  
1 (800) 695-4058  
Fax (410) 321-3851

### **SUPPORT FOR SB 480**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

We are writing to express the support of the Office of the State Prosecutor for Senate Bill 480. The Office of the State Prosecutor is tasked with enforcement of Maryland election laws and believes that this legislation will aid in protecting election judges in Maryland and preserving the integrity of the electoral process.

### **The Office of the State Prosecutor**

The Office of the State Prosecutor is an independent agency within the Executive Branch of government. The Office is tasked with ensuring the honesty and integrity of State government and elections by conducting thorough, independent investigations and, when appropriate, prosecutions of criminal conduct affecting the integrity of our State and local government institutions, officials, employees and elections.

### **Election Judges- Protections**

This legislation ensures that those who volunteer to protect the integrity of Maryland's elections are protected when threatened because of their service. Election judges around the country have been threatened and harassed, with their personal information shared on social media sites encouraging people to go to their homes and even cause them physical harm. This has resulted in the local boards of elections around the State seeing a decrease in volunteers to serve as election judges.

Fortunately, Maryland has a committed cohort of individuals who are willing to serve as election law judges despite modern challenges. However, as modern challenges have emerged, the law has not caught up with addressing those challenges. The way the current law is drafted only addresses interference with the electoral process and neglects to protect the individuals who serve as election law judges. The law also does not address the vast array of threats that derive from social media and non-physical means. This body, wisely, has expanded the law in areas of harassment and stalking to address the non-physical harms caused by social media attacks and "doxxing" (publishing private information about an individual on the internet, often with malicious intent) and we are asking to extend those protections to those who serve the public by ensuring transparency and fairness in the electoral process.

This legislation mirrors language from stalking, harassment, and other statutes in determining what constitutes "a threat" and "serious emotional distress." The language has been litigated and

defined by Maryland courts as well as within the statutory scheme of the Criminal Law code. We hope that in ensuring this protection for election judges, we are better able to comprehensively address challenges that may arise during voting and give security assurances to those who volunteer to maintain fair elections in Maryland.

We encourage this Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 480.

Sincerely,

**CHARLTON T. HOWARD**  
**STATE PROSECUTOR**

**SB0480-EEE\_MACo\_SUP.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sarah Sample

Position: FAV





**MARYLAND**  
*Association of*  
**COUNTIES**

## **Senate Bill 480**

### *Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment  
Committee

Date: February 21, 2024

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 480. This bill would protect and defend the staff who manage and conduct elections, by making it a misdemeanor to threaten election officials or their immediate family members.

Counties facilitate federal, state, and local elections for all communities across Maryland. Local election officials, board members, employees, and judges are indispensable to this process. Threats and intimidating behavior toward these officials can have devastating consequences for the integrity and efficiency of this critical practice.

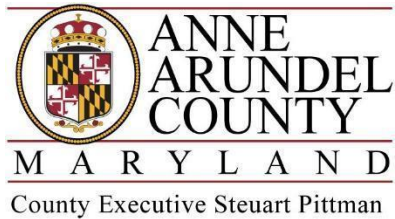
Counties believe the provisions of SB 480 will allow for corrective actions to be taken to mitigate these concerning and persistent behaviors. Local jurisdictions rely on enthusiastic election workers and facilitators to step into these vital roles, but unregulated threats and divisive actions will continue to discourage good, qualified candidates from facilitating elections. Additionally, residents will be deterred from engaging in elections if they don't feel safe at a local polling location.

Adopting necessary protections specific to these local officials will allow local governments to continue carrying out fair, safe, and accessible elections across Maryland. For these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report for SB 480.

**Anne Arundel County \_FAV\_SB480.pdf**

Uploaded by: Steuart Pittman

Position: FAV



February 21, 2024

**Senate Bill 480**

**Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024**

**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

Anne Arundel County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 480 – Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024

Elections are a critical tool in our democracy and we make our voices heard every two, four, and six years on who will represent us in our local, state, and federal government. They require rigorous hours of service from individuals who take the time to ensure a fair and efficient process at the ballot box. Recently, we have seen an increase in threats, harassment, and violence towards election officials, and this behavior jeopardizes the integrity of our elections. This is unacceptable.

Senate Bill 480 prohibits an individual from knowingly making a threat to harm an election official or an immediate family member. I applaud the Moore-Miller Administration for bringing this legislation to the forefront and making the protection of election officials and administrators a top priority as we push to uphold our values as a state and as a nation. Anne Arundel County fully supports the highly qualified staff and dedicated volunteers who uphold the integrity of our elections despite the possibility of threats and intimidation.

Maryland can be a leader in protecting our democracy, and in order to do so, we must protect those who willingly serve on the frontlines. For all of these reasons, I respectfully request a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 480.

Steuart Pittman  
County Executive

**2024-02-21 SB480 (Support With Amendments).pdf**

Uploaded by: Adam Spangler

Position: FWA

CANDACE McLAREN LANHAM  
*Chief Deputy Attorney General*



CHRISTIAN E. BARRERA  
*Chief Operating Officer*

CAROLYN A. QUATTROCKI  
*Deputy Attorney General*

ZENITA WICKHAM HURLEY  
*Chief, Equity, Policy, and Engagement*

LEONARD HOWIE  
*Deputy Attorney General*

**ANTHONY G. BROWN**  
*Attorney General*

PETER V. BERNS  
*General Counsel*

STATE OF MARYLAND  
**OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

FACSIMILE NO.  
(410) 576-7036

WRITER'S DIRECT DIAL NO  
(410) 576-6588

February 21, 2024

TO: The Honorable Brain Feldman  
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Adam Spangler  
Legislative Aide, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: Senate Bill 480 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024 – **(Support w/  
Amendments)**

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The Office of the Attorney General requests the Committee report Governor Wes Moore's **Senate Bill 480 - Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024** favorable with amendments. Senate Bill 480 creates a new criminal offense in the Election Law Article for threatening an election official or the election official's family because of the election official's role in administering the election process.

Election officials work long hours during the election cycle, ensuring that the gears of democracy continue to turn. However, being an election official has come under scrutiny and election officials have been threatened at a much greater rate in recent election cycles.<sup>1</sup> According to a 2023 Brennan Center for Justice poll, election officials are under attack and leaving their jobs. More than half of the respondents to the polls expressed concerns about their safety and the safety of their colleagues. Nearly one in three election officials report knowing at

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<sup>1</sup> Gross, Joelle and Baltz, Samuel and Suttman-Lea, Mara and Merivaki, Thessalia and Stewart III, Charles, Online Hostility Towards Local Election Officials Surged in 2020 (February 8, 2023). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4351996> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4351996>

least one colleague who quit their job partly or entirely because of safety concerns, increased threats, or intimidation.<sup>2</sup>

The Office of Attorney General would like to offer the following amendment. The definition of Senate Bill 480 “election official” includes many individuals who have a role in administering the election process, however, the definition does not include counsel to a local board of elections or counsel to the State Board. The Office of the Attorney General would respectfully ask the committee to cover the Assistant Attorneys General assigned to the Maryland State Board of Elections and the Assistant Attorney General who counsels the Baltimore City Board of Elections, since the contact information Assistant Attorneys General is made public by court filings.

Election officials should be able to carry out their duties knowing there is criminal liability for anyone who threatens them or their family simply for their role in administering an election. The Office of the Attorney General wants to ensure that our Assistant Attorneys General and local board of elections counsel, who are integral to the administration of the election process, enjoy the same protections as the other individuals already listed in Senate Bill 480.

For the foregoing reasons, the Office of the Attorney General requests a favorable with amendments report for Senate Bill 480.

cc: Governor Wes Moore  
Education, Energy and Environment Committee Members

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<sup>2</sup> *Local Election Officials Survey — April 2023*. (n.d.). Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/local-election-officials-survey-april-2023>

# **2024 SB0480 Testimony against 2024-02-21.pdf**

Uploaded by: Alan Lang

Position: UNF

## Testimony Against SB0480

Please vote against SB0480.

At first glance, who could be against a bill that is purportedly written to protect election workers? However, after reading it more closely, I think the bill should be defeated, or at least amended.

What is a threat and who decides? Is asking about election integrity considered threatening? This bill is not well defined or thought-out.... For example, "harm" is defined as serious injury or serious emotional distress. So does that mean one could make a threat to inflict minor injury or just insult them with "mean tweets"?

The fact that bill is specifically about election officials as opposed to all officials in general, is dangerous. Anytime the government tries to keep us "safe," it ends up doing just the opposite, or is meted out in a one-sided fashion, i.e., it will be okay to harass and intimidate Republican poll watchers but not Democrat poll watchers. Sadly, my colleague knows a Republican judge, an older lady who was intimidated and essentially run out of the polling place, so it happens. I want to support this bill but after watching the hearing for the sister bill HB0585, especially the last speaker, I cannot do it as the bill is currently written.

[https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Committees/Media/false?cmte=jud&ys=2024RS&clip=JUD\\_2\\_6\\_2024\\_meeting\\_1&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmgahouse.maryland.gov%2Fmga%2Fplay%2Ffc45544d487a43d498410f163cfafc381d%3Fcatalog%2F03e481c7-8a42-4438-a7da-93ff74bdaa4c%26playfrom%3D1381370](https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Committees/Media/false?cmte=jud&ys=2024RS&clip=JUD_2_6_2024_meeting_1&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmgahouse.maryland.gov%2Fmga%2Fplay%2Ffc45544d487a43d498410f163cfafc381d%3Fcatalog%2F03e481c7-8a42-4438-a7da-93ff74bdaa4c%26playfrom%3D1381370)

Perhaps we could testify favorably with amendment if the following section from Maryland Code Section 3-805 (d) (Misuse of Electronic Communication or Interactive Service) was added. It states, "Subsection (b)(1) through (5) of this section does not apply to a peaceable activity: (1) intended to express a political view or provide information to others; or (2) conducted for a lawful purpose." According to testimony for HB0585, SB0480 used Section 3-805 (b)(2) to define harm as serious bodily injury or serious emotional distress. I am more than curious why the disclaimer quoted in this paragraph was omitted from HB0480 and HB0585.

Please vote against SB0480.

Alan Lang  
242 Armstrong Lane  
Pasadena, MD 21122  
410-336-9745  
[Alanlang1@verizon.net](mailto:Alanlang1@verizon.net)



**Sb0480 oppose.pdf**

Uploaded by: Peggy Williams

Position: UNF

SB0480

OPPOSE

Dear Committee Members:

This bill should be worded more specifically. With the way it is worded, I am opposed to it.

Peggy Williams

Severna Park

D31

# **SB0480.pdf**

Uploaded by: Suzanne Duffy

Position: UNF

SB0480 is a ridiculous bill and nonsensical unless they have something to be afraid of?The only threat there has ever been in the entire history of voting in the state of Maryland was last year when a supposed white substance was supposedly mailed to Maryland election offices. There was zero evidence and that information was shared by an election official. Seems it was all a sham to get a BS bill like this to pass. Fear based on lies and misinformation. SAY NO TO this really dumb bill.

Suzanne Price  
AACo

# **SB480 - Hovland - MGA Senate EEE 2.21.24 Testimony**

Uploaded by: Ben Hovland

Position: INFO



U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION  
633 3rd St. NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20001

**Bill:** Senate Bill 480, Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024  
**Committee:** Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, Maryland General Assembly  
**Position:** Letter of Information

February 21, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagen, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a letter of information for this hearing on Senate Bill 480, the “Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024.” My name is Ben Hovland, Vice Chair of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, or EAC. The EAC is an independent, bipartisan commission established by the Help America Vote Act of 2002, and is the only federal agency solely dedicated to election administration.

As EAC chair in 2020, I received a call while grocery shopping that a website had my picture behind a target with the phrase “your days are numbered,” a countdown clock, and a picture of my house and address in Silver Spring, Maryland. I hung up and called my wife to see where she and our children were, but there was no answer.

Why was I in this situation? Because I did my duty and was honest about the integrity of our elections.

Before I got home, my wife called and let me know they were having fun at the neighborhood playground. I am grateful my family was safe, but my story is just one example of many experienced by election officials across the country.

In the last several election cycles, there have been unprecedented levels of mis- and dis-information, from both foreign and domestic sources about the integrity of our election process and results. This dangerous rhetoric sows distrust, making the public servants in charge of running our nation’s elections the targets of criminal abuse and threats far too often.

To be clear, any threat or act taken on a public servant, especially those trusted with operating our nation’s election infrastructure, is unacceptable and should be investigated and dealt with according to local, state, and federal law.

My fellow Commissioners and I regularly meet with election officials across the country. Since the 2020 elections, we have heard many distressing stories about the threats and harassment election officials, their families, and colleagues have faced simply for doing their jobs. Numerous officials have received threatening messages at home or work. Some have had their and their family members’ personal information posted online. Election officials and staff have been followed home from work. In some extreme examples, an Arizona election official’s pet dog was

poisoned. Additionally, in New Mexico there was even an incident where a failed candidate orchestrated drive-by shootings at the homes of those who certified the election. More recently, election officials have also been the targets of highly dangerous swatting incidents, which put lives in harm's way and sap local police and emergency response resources.

These incidents have an impact on the individuals involved and the entire elections community, from volunteer poll workers to elected officials. Coupled with the challenges of combatting mis- and dis- information, our current environment has caused many election officials to leave the profession or retire.

Looking to the future, the 2023 Survey of Local Election Officials by the Elections & Voting Information Center (EVIC) at Reed College found that 1 in 10 local election officials have considered leaving due to safety concerns. Additionally, 4 out of 10 local election officials currently plan to retire before 2026.

Where do we go from here? The EAC and other federal agencies have resources for safety assessments, how to report a threat, documentation, and mental health, as well as certain federal funding available to ensure the personal and physical safety of election officials, offices, and polling locations. Organizations like the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections have focused on helping election officials and local law enforcement work together for more effective partnerships to ensure the safety of election officials, workers, voters, and election sites.

These efforts, however, can only do so much. There must be accountability for those that threaten and harass election officials. To be clear, I am not speaking about limiting protected free speech or curtailing anyone's ability to engage in a respectful dialogue about how elections are run. Free speech is a central tenant of American democracy.

What is not protected and what should be prosecuted, is when individuals make violent threats to terrorize the public servants who administer our elections. Such actions take a toll on the targeted individuals, their families and co-workers, and ultimately undermine the democracy we cherish as Americans.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story and some of what we are seeing across the country.

Sincerely,



Ben Hovland  
Vice Chair  
U.S. Election Assistance Commission