

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB555 Criminal Law - Unauthorized Dissemination of Personal Identifying Information - Prohibition

Dear Chair Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee Members:

I thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 0555 Unauthorized Dissemination of Personal Identifying Information. I am here as both a graduate worker at Johns Hopkins University.

I have been at JHU for over six years and seen my fair share of the exact types of incidents that are exactly described by this House Bill. I know many people this has happened but in fact I have three friends that this has happened to. My first friend was targeted with their full name and identifying information, as well as having photos taken without their consent were put up online. They were targeted as an attempt to intimidate a group of students I was organizing. Of this group, they only targeted the Black students with the exception of my second friend, who is Palestinian. They have been targeted also many years ago in the same way as my first friend by having personal identifying information leaked online for speaking about violence happening in Palestine. Not only did this make them stop being involved with their community but this in fact impacted their academic studies. Lastly, my third friend was very recently targeted. They are also Palestinian, which is troubling to me as 2/3 friends who experienced this are Palestinian.

On another level, our grad union uses a messaging app called Slack, which is public in the sense that its not personal messages and anyone on the channel can see messages. It is private in the sense that it is only for grad workers in our union to join and become members of. The reason I am explaining this is because someone in this Slack was angry at our Union and particularly at my Palestinian friend. This person gave quotes from specifically from my friend along with identifying information, everything but their name, and gave this information to a journalist for the Baltimore Banner who published an article with enough uniquely identifying information about my friend. Our Union, then, reached out to the Banner where the journalist who published the article claimed that Slack is not completely private therefore its not a breach of privacy and therefore this was legal and in his rights to do.

This is why I am testifying in support of this Bill. The Banner later revised and removed the identifying information about my friend because they didn't want to become enemies with our Union which has over 3000 grad workers and they realized in this 'grey area' of most-likely illegal. This shouldn't be a in grey area or something that has to be proven in court. The fact that this isn't explicitly prohibited by law means that people are going to do it; that is why the legal system exists, to signify that this isn't okay and protect communities. The exact stories I describe fall exactly in the language of the Bill "Prohibiting the unauthorized dissemination of certain personal identifying information without permission, with the intent to threaten... etc." It is understandable that this seems very unique to people my age group. All three of the stories involve online chats or websites dedicated to 'doxxing' people which is understandable why a Bill like this never had to exist until now in 2024.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the House to understand that the things this Bill aims to prohibit are something that need to be stopped in law sooner than later because of the intimidation and harm it has on people. I urge you to support HB0555 and protect students like myself.

Thank you for considering my testimony on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Sean Hare

Student at the Johns Hopkins University

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