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## ILLINOIS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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February 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee  
Room 101  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Thank you Delegate Johnson, Chair Clippinger and members of the Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to present this testimony in support of HB555.

My name is Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz and I serve in the Illinois General Assembly as Representative of the 17<sup>th</sup> House District, which is located in Chicago's northern suburbs. I serve as chair of our Judiciary-Civil Committee and have dealt with doxing and other issues related to the rise in online hate and harassment extensively in that role.

I submit this testimony today in support of HB555, which shares the goal of legislation I introduced and is now law in Illinois. Our anti-doxing legislation was passed with unanimous, bipartisan support and included both Democratic and Republican co-sponsors.

Illinois' legislation created a path to justice in civil courts for victims of 'Doxing,' a practice that has caused real and lasting harm to people, disproportionately so to women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and religious minorities. Crucially, this anti-doxing legislation also provides a deterrent against perpetrators of doxing that does not currently exist in Maryland.

Doxing occurs when a person publishes personal information, usually including phone numbers, emails, social media accounts, and/or home addresses, to incite harassment against an individual or targeted group. In recent years, doxing has become the most effective way to crowdsource hatred, threats, and even violence on the internet. Existing laws often leave gaping loopholes or ignore the issue entirely, leaving victims with no recourse and perpetrators with no consequences.

This abhorrent practice must be addressed with legislation specifically designed to stop it. Current cyberstalking and cyberbullying laws simply do not adequately protect victims of doxing and the perpetrators of these acts know that – which is why this kind of harassment is so prevalent.

In 2022, a young woman named Clara Sorrenti was doxed and viciously harassed. She was forced into hiding, living in a hotel, where she was doxed yet again.

Clara's story is tragically common in America today. There are tens of thousands of people – mostly women – who have experienced similar harassment as the result of doxing.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, 27% of people have experienced extreme harassment, including doxing, in 2021 – the most recent data available. We have every reason to believe that this sort of organized online harassment will continue to grow and harm more people unless it is stopped.

In passing this kind of legislation, exceptional care must be taken to ensure that constitutionally-protected activity is not deemed unlawful. The bill we passed in Illinois, upon which HB555 was partially modeled, was carefully constructed to strike that right balance to ensure constitutional rights as well as potential victims of doxing are both protected.

As lawmakers, we strive to keep our constituents safe from new and emerging threats. Doxing and other novel forms of online harassment are part of the evolving technological landscape. Ensuring that our laws are keeping pace with that ever-changing landscape is among the most difficult and necessary parts of our job.

HB555 is legislation that seeks to protect vulnerable, private individuals from being threatened or hurt because their information was maliciously shared online for the purpose of generating extreme forms of harassment, and I urge my esteemed colleagues in Maryland to pass this measure with all due speed.