



**Bill:** House Bill 1129:  
Constitutional Officers – Gender-Neutral Language

**Sponsor:** Delegate Dana Jones

**Hearing Date:** March 10, 2025

## **Position: SUPPORT**

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The Maryland Commission for Women strongly supports House Bill 1129, which seeks to modernize the language of the Maryland Constitution by ensuring that references to our constitutional officers are gender-neutral. This simple yet significant change reflects the modern role of women and individuals of all gender identities in public service. By replacing outdated, masculine terminology with neutral language, Maryland takes an important step toward recognizing the contributions and leadership potential of all individuals, regardless of gender. This update is long overdue, not just to recognize the trailblazing women who have served in these roles, but also to inspire all the young people who may one day follow in their historic footsteps.

The Maryland Commission for Women recently published “*2025 Status of Women in Maryland: A Report on Maryland Women in Elected Office*.” According to this report:

- Maryland currently has its first female Comptroller
- Maryland currently has its second female and first woman of color Lieutenant Governor.
- Maryland is one of only 20 states that has never had a woman as Attorney General.
- Maryland is one of only 18 states that has never had a woman as Governor.

Maryland’s Secretary of State Susan Lee, while a trailblazer, is not the first woman in this role. That glass ceiling was shattered in 1949 by Vivian V. Simpson. According to her biography in the *Maryland Women’s Hall of Fame* (a project of the Maryland Commission for Women hosted by the state archives), while a student at University of Maryland, College Park:

*Simpson found the rules on campus unfair to women - rules that prohibited smoking for female students, but not for males, requirements that women in dormitories turn off their lights at 9:30 p.m., while no such restrictions were placed on the men on campus.*

*She deliberately violated the lights-out rule and vigorously defended women suspended for violating the no-smoking rule.*

*However, her involvement with a group of female students who provided secret affidavits to a Washington Post reporter alleging sexual exploitation of the co-eds by the faculty (including seductions and "spanking parties") led to the University's refusal to readmit her the following semester. The resulting scandal brought the resignation of the University President, according to A History of the University of Maryland by Professor George Callcott, and the denial of an education to Ms. Simpson.*

*She sued the University of Maryland for readmission and won the case, but it was overturned on appeal, with the justices noting that this "was a young woman not readily submissive to rules and regulations." However, her experience introduced her to the field of law and no doubt led to her decision to become an attorney at a time when it was almost unheard of for women to pursue such a profession.*

While times have certainly changed since Secretary Simpson and so many other trailblazing women have shattered glass ceilings, our state's Constitution has not kept up. It is a fitting tribute to their leadership in the face of significant obstacles to make the effort to update our Constitution. It would be a reflection of our gratitude, and a gesture of commitment to continue their legacy of expanding opportunity for all.

The Commission thanks Delegate Jones for introducing this legislation and respectfully urges the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1129 and move Maryland forward in its commitment to inclusivity and fairness for all individuals serving in public office. Our Executive Director Ariana Kelly is available to answer any further questions at [Ariana.Kelly@Maryland.Gov](mailto:Ariana.Kelly@Maryland.Gov)

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