



Senate Bill 621

Courtroom Security - Minimum Adequate Security Standard

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: February 12, 2025

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 621 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill would require counties across the state to fund substantially more positions for security officers in the Circuit Courts. While counties support the intent, the bill mandates funding without an understanding yet, from the courts, as to the exact cost of officer shortages or needed equipment by jurisdiction.

Circuit Courts are fully funded by county governments but operated by the State, with only a finite number of expenses eligible for reimbursement from state funding. As written, the bill requires juvenile, family, and criminal law proceedings to have one officer each. Any proceeding with an incarcerated individual would need two officers and an extra officer is required for every four courtrooms per floor in the courthouse. The requirement further specifies that by 2028, all proceedings not included before that time must now have a security officer present.

While these are worthy standards to establish, the actual current security capacity of each Circuit Court has not been made clear to counties, only that it would be a significant increase from current practice. Therefore, anticipating and planning for these new costs in the county budget is not possible at this time. Counties think a program like this could only be successful following a thorough study of where the deficiencies are, so that the cost can be accurately estimated. For that reason, an amendment to SB 621 allowing for the provisions to take effect following a comprehensive analysis by the Judiciary would be a more prudent route.

It is also not a practical solution to assume counties can absorb these new and unclear costs. Counties have very few avenues to raise revenue to support new mandates. With two-thirds of taxpayers already paying the maximum local income tax, and substantially increasing costs to cover existing mandates in education and elsewhere, it would better serve residents if an amendment to SB 621 required the standard to be fulfilled only as state funding is made available to cover costs for the additional officers or equipment determined through a study.

These changes would more practically serve the intent of SB 621 and facilitate progress toward compliance. For this reason, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for SB 621.