

Testimony - SB 311 - Government Officials Family P

Uploaded by: Brandon Butler

Position: FAV



The Honorable Will Smith
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Center for Election Science, a leader in the implementation of approval voting, would like to express its support for **Senate Bill 311: Government Officials' Family Protection Act of 2025**.

The Center for Election Science was proud to support the Moore Administration's efforts during the 2024 Legislative Session in passing Senate Bill 480, a measure that protects the democratic process while simultaneously protecting elections officials. This measure takes that effort a step forward in that it also protects the immediate families of public officials. We support this inclusion.

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, we 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.

Sincerely,

Nina Taylor, MA
Chief Executive Officer
The Center for Election Science
Nina@electionscience.org

The Center for Election Science
440 N Barranca Ave, #2468 Covina, CA 91723

SB 311 Senator Simonaire_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV



The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB 311 - "Government Officials' Family Protection Act of 2025"

I am Senator Bryan Simonaire presenting SB 311.

As you know last year, the **senate unanimously passed** SB 480 that provided protections for election workers and their immediate family due to the rise of threats against election workers.

Sadly, while we provided protection for election worker's families, our **elected official families** do not receive the same protections.

It **may not surprise you**, but **threats** to elected officials and their families have increased as well, and most notably in the last couple years.

But is it not just happening nationally - According to the State of MD:

During the period between 2014-2022: threats reported did not exceed 10.

During the years from 2023 – 2024: There were 21 reported threats with 2 threats against family members.

This bill aims to provide the **same protections** that we give to election worker's families to elected official's families.

This is **accomplished by** altering the existing elected official protections in Criminal Law 3–708 to include protections for immediate family members.

In fact, the '*immediate family*' language used in this bill is **word for word** from last years' bill as it applied to election workers.

That means protections for your parents, your spouse and your children.

Sadly, more and more families are being **drawn into a world of violence** they never should have to experience.

Politics has changed since I came in the Senate in 2007.

People are **more emboldened** to threaten elected officials and their families.

To be clear: Current protections for elected officials **do not include** protections for their immediate family members.

It would be **hard to justify** protecting an election worker's immediate family member from threats **but deny those same protections** to an elected officials' family member.

I firmly believe elected officials who are performing a public service and are often the target of threats deserve to have those same protections extended to their family members who, at times, are drawn into **threats simply by association**.

The **General Assembly** has seen an increase in serious threats to individuals and collectively as a body. Just within the last year, this body has received several bomb threats requiring evacuation of the whole complex.

Threats have increased locally as well. For example, in the last 3 years, **Anne Arundel County** had a **total of 24 threats against** their local elected officials.

We **cannot wait for a threat to become a reality** against our family members. We need to act just as decisively as we did last year and provide protections for elected official's family members as we did for election workers and their family members.

I ask for your favorable consideration.

SB 311 - Government Officials' Family Protection A

Uploaded by: Morgan Drayton

Position: FAV

January 27, 2025

**Testimony on SB 311
Government Officials' Family Protection Act of 2025
Judicial Proceedings**

Position: Favorable

Common Cause is in support of SB 311, which would prohibit threats against the immediate family members of certain government officials and employees. The security of Maryland's elected leaders is essential to maintaining peace, order, and trust within the state.

Local elected officials across the United States faced escalating insults and harassment in the lead-up to the 2024 general election – a recent survey from Princeton University found that 53% of local elected officials reported receiving insults, and 39% reported dealing with some form of harassment between July and October, representing a significant increase from the previous quarter.¹ These numbers point to a growing climate of political hostility and make it easy to understand why would have lawmakers have concerns about the security of their immediate families.

SB 311 addresses this issue by establishing a misdemeanor that will function as a deterrent to prevent future extremists from targeting the immediate family members of our state and local elected officials. Last session, the Legislature took similar steps to offer increased protection to our elections officials, who had been experiencing a similar increase in threats and harassment as we approached the general election date.

Considering the charged political climate across the country, it is critical that the Maryland General Assembly work together to send a strong message to would-be-offenders. No public servant or their family should be endangered simply for doing their job. Ensuring the safety and security of our elected officials' immediate families will help ensure that the Maryland legislative process remains safe, secure, and accessible to all Marylanders.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 311.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/dec/04/local-officials-hostility-election>

SB311 Government Officials' Family Protection Act.

Uploaded by: Nikki Tyree

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

SB 311 Government Officials' Family Protection Act of 2025

POSITION: Favorable

BY: Linda Kohn, President

DATE: January 29, 2025

The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization with a mission to involve all Marylanders in the democratic process that is free, equitable, and inclusive. One of the key elements to that is ensuring that those in office reflect and represent the differing communities who call Maryland their home.

Unfortunately, as we have seen recently in the news as well as in the past couple of years in Annapolis, those who have chosen to serve as an elected or official representative of the Maryland government and their families are coming under threat that includes physical harm, harassment, bullying, threats, and in some cases doxxing. SB 311 would enshrine that those who come under threat, especially family members, including children, have recourse to handling these problems if they arise.

It is critical to say that we cannot have the diverse mix of state officials we are fortunate to have in Maryland— which encourages marginalized communities to participate in democracy— if people are too fearful for their lives and/or families lives to run for office, accept appointments, or take jobs that would put them in harm's way.

Many of the officials that SB 311 would protect sign up because they feel a strong commitment to civic duty and want to serve their communities. LWVMD is hopeful that added protections for officials and their families will deter those who might otherwise commit crimes as well as give a semblance of peace of mind to those currently serving.

The League of Women Voters urges a favorable report on SB 311.

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Uploaded by: Sarah Sample

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 311

Government Officials' Family Protection Act of 2025

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: January 29, 2025

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS SB 311**. This bill extends existing protections for several local officials, to include their immediate family members. These safeguards will help reassure public servants that their own safety and that of their family members are taken seriously in the eyes of the law.

National, state, and local politics have become more tense in recent years. The number of incidents and threats against local officials have steadily increased as political climates intensify. As quasi-political entities, local government officials and workforces are susceptible to some of the challenges that materialize from these kinds of shifts in political temperament. Often, as residents' ire spreads to public officials' homes, their family members are subject to threats, and in some instances become direct targets of aggression.

Locally elected officials, election judges, law enforcement, health officers, school administrators, and DEI directors are no strangers to these real and often threatening situations. The fear and discomfort this can create for individuals could lead to the erosion of vital local government leadership and workforces. Establishing that penalties for these types of offenses apply more broadly sends the message that this behavior will not be tolerated. Counties would welcome even further eligibility for other public sector staff not currently identified in these laws.

Encouraging public service is necessary to ensure communities are safe and productive for all residents. The provisions of this bill help counterbalance how threats can deter engagement. Counties appreciate that this bill will ensure appropriate accountability and deterrence for offenders who would threaten local government officials and their families. For these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report for SB 311.

Anne Arundel County _FAV_SB311.pdf

Uploaded by: Steuart Pittman

Position: FAV

January 29, 2025

Senate Bill 311

Government Officials' Family Protection Act of 2025

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Anne Arundel County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 311 - Government Officials' Family Protection Act of 2025. This Bill adds immediate family members of government officials to the list of government officials to which the current criminal prohibition on threats applies. These include a State or local official, a deputy State's Attorney, an assistant State's Attorney, or an assistant Public Defender.

Threats against local officials across the country have been on the rise for several years. A 2024 report from the Brennan Center for Justice found that threats, harassment, and intimidation against state and local officials, as well as their families, have increased across demographics and political ideologies.¹ These threats constrain constituent engagement, limit the policy positions local officials may feel safe to support, and make them less willing to continue in public service. In fact, over 40 percent of local officeholders said they were less willing to run for reelection or higher office at the time they were surveyed because of abuse and fifty-three percent of state legislators believed that abuse had deterred their colleagues from taking on controversial topics.² Threats against government officials' families impinge on the public discourse and debate that is vital to a functioning democracy, which is why federal law has criminalized threats against federal officials and their family members since 1984. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 115.

Accordingly, Anne Arundel County respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 311.

¹ Gowri Ramachandran, et al, "Intimidation of State and Local Officeholders" The Brennan Center for Justice, 2024. Available at: <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/intimidation-state-and-local-officeholders>

² Id.