

SB 621 - MSAA Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Patrick Gilbert

Position: FAV



Maryland State's Attorneys' Association

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Rich Gibson
President

Steven I. Kroll
Coordinator

DATE: February 10, 2025

BILL NUMBER: SB 621

POSITION: Favorable

The Maryland State's Attorneys' Association (MSAA) supports Senate Bill 621 and urges this Committee to issue a favorable report.

Prosecutors understand that the safety and security of all individuals involved in the judicial process – including judges, attorneys, court personnel, victims, defendants, witnesses, and the public – is paramount to the effective and fair administration of justice. The just adjudication of cases requires that courts and parties fulfill their constitutional obligations impartially, and they deserve to do so without fearing for their safety. Unfortunately, incidents of threats and violence related to the judicial process have increased in recent years – SB 621 takes an important step to address this by ensuring a level of security consistent across jurisdictions in Maryland. By issuing a favorable report on SB 621, this Committee will signal that fair and impartial justice is a priority to our State, and that we are willing to act to ensure everyone feels safe when they are in court.

2025 SB 621 - JPR (FAV) (2025-02-12).pdf

Uploaded by: Sam Cogen

Position: FAV

Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

Samuel Cogen, Sheriff

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TO: The Honorable Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Nicholas T.R. Blendy, Esq., Assistant Sheriff, Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

RE: Senate Bill 621 – Courtroom Security – Minimum Adequate Security Standard

DATE: February 12, 2025

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Sheriff's Office (BCSO) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 621.

SB 621 is legislation introduced via recommendation of the report of the Task Force on the Safety of Judicial Facilities ("Task Force"), which is itself a creation of the General Assembly of Maryland as a result of the enactment of Chapters 414 & 415 of the Laws of Maryland of 2024 in the legislation entitled, Court Personnel – Protection of Personal Information (Judge Andrew F. Wilkinson Judicial Security Act).

The Task Force met on six occasions with several breakout subcommittee meetings in consideration of a holistic review of the security preparedness of Maryland's wide variety of judicial facilities. The Task Force identified several areas where the security resources have not kept pace with the workload of the Maryland Judiciary and the usage of facilities by a wide cross-section of the public. However, the Task Force was mindful of the fiscal realities facing the resources of both the State of Maryland and the local governments (who are constitutionally required and traditionally bear the costs of funding many of the operations of the state judiciary within their respective boundaries), and as a result, SB 621 represents an honest, thoughtful, and realistic approach toward rebalancing the security needs of the judicial facilities of Maryland over a period of time offering adequate planning for resource allocation.

If enacted, SB 621 would set a clear, uniform, and minimum adequate security standard for the operations of security personnel in the courtrooms and courthouses around the State. In Baltimore City, where its Sheriff is the Chief of Court House Security as designated by State law¹, the resources devoted to this service are deeply incongruous to those that are required as the number of judges has more than doubled since the responsibility was first given to the Sheriff in 1973. For example, in 1973, there were

¹ See Md. Code of Pub. Local Laws, Art. 4, §§ 22-6 thru 22-11, et seq.

fifteen (15) judges of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City², whereas there are thirty-five (35) in 2025.³ In 1973, there were thirty-five (35) funded court security officer (CSO) position in the Sheriff's budget; today, there are thirty-seven (37), even as the number of judges has more than doubled. And as Baltimore City Sheriff Sam Cogen learned during his participation in the Task Force, this is an issue of resources that repeats itself to varying degrees in the counties around the State.

SB 621 proposes to resolve this issue by imposing a few simple mandates on the facilities the Baltimore City Sheriff is responsible for. First, it creates a statewide standard for the minimum training and certification a Court Security Officer (CSO) must have, which is the existing qualifications for a Special Police Officer (PSO) from the Public Safety Article. The BCSO supports this standard because it has created a partnership with Coppin State University to run a CSO certification course that trains every student to the minimum PSO standards that are set to take effect on July 1, 2025, as well as some additional training that is Baltimore City Courthouse specific. Just last month, the BCSO graduated its first class of 17 CSOs that meet the standards that SB 621 contemplates, and they are now working in the Baltimore City Courthouse facilities in the CSO capacity contemplated by this bill.

The second mandate this bill creates is a minimum personnel standard for each courtroom that is hearing certain types of cases on a two-tiered timeline: first by the start of Fiscal Year 2027 (July 1, 2026), and then a full staffing timeline at the start of Fiscal Year 2029 (July 1, 2028). These standards are very thoughtfully contemplated and recommended by the Task Force, and they should help ensure that no matter what corner of the State of Maryland a member of the public is entering into a judicial facility, they can be confident the standards for safety are adequate to protect them as they conduct their business.

Third, the legislation mandates that the BCSO—along with every other law enforcement responsible for providing security at these facilities—provide a report to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Maryland and the General Assembly that identifies all of the relevant information required by this bill. The BCSO strongly supports this mandate, and has submitted similar information to the Administrative Office of the Courts back in January of 2024, which outlined the challenges facing Baltimore City, specifically.

In closing, the issue of security in judicial facilities is one that is unfortunately front and center of the news these days. Throughout the country and in every corner of the State of Maryland, the hardworking personnel that keep the safety of judges, judicial employees, individuals awaiting their trials, jurors, and other members of the general public are doing their work without a minimum and uniform standard to adequately ensure our safety in and around these facilities. SB 621 is an important step in providing the security that all Marylanders deserve when they are in these buildings.

For the foregoing reasons, the BCSO respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 621.

² The Supreme Bench of Baltimore City was reorganized as the Circuit Court of Baltimore City in 1983 after a 1980 amendment to the Maryland Constitution took effect.

³ See Md. Courts & Jud. Proc. §1-503(b).

Sheriff takes over Court Security Forces

The judiciary expressed displeasure with this legislation, and of the ability to appoint bailiffs, calling the move "political piracy"

Supreme Bench judges crying 'piracy' as sheriff bids for 54 Courthouse jobs

By RICHARD BEN CRAMER
Annapolis Bureau of The Sun

Annapolis—A bill to give Baltimore's sheriff patronage control over 54 Courthouse security jobs has provoked cries of "political piracy" from the city's Supreme Bench judges. Senator Harry J. McGuirk and Delegate Paul E. Weisengoff (both D., 37th, Baltimore) sponsored the bill to make Sheriff George W. Freeberger, a former delegate, security chief for the Courthouse.

The 54 security guards charged with maintaining order and protecting the judges are hired and controlled by them.

Although Mr. Freeberger's own deputy sheriffs are covered by the state merit system and have to be appointed from

civil service lists of applicants, the 54 Courthouse jobs would provide a pool of job slots into which Mr. Freeberger might place whomever he wants.

Judge Anselm Sodaro, the Supreme Bench chief, took the unusual step this week of sending a protest letter to every General Assembly member. Judge Sodaro called the bill "a piece of political piracy to enhance the political patronage of the sheriff."

"The sheriff is a member of the Courthouse family," Judge Sodaro said. "I think it was very ungentlemanly of him to soft-shoe in a bill involving one of the important activities of the Supreme Bench without consulting any of the members of the bench."

Judge Sodaro's reference to "soft-shoes" apparently was intended to give "credit" for the legislative maneuver to Mr. McGuirk, who bears that nickname.

Mr. McGuirk appeared wounded when it was suggested that patronage considerations inspired his legislation. "Oh no," he said. "What this came out of was research on the Constitutional functions of the sheriff of Baltimore city."

Mr. McGuirk said sheriffs elsewhere in Maryland and the nation traditionally hold responsibility for courthouse security. He did not cite the constitutional provision that extends this tradition to Baltimore.

Mr. Weisengoff said consoli-

dation of deputy sheriffs and Courthouse security guards would lead to more efficient service in the Courthouse. He said the Courthouse security budget of more than \$500,000 a year could be reduced by consolidation.

But Mr. Weisengoff did not skirt the subject of patronage entirely.

An interview with Mr. Weisengoff on the patronage question went like this:

"Off the record?," "No."

"Not for attribution?," "No."

"Well, how does this sound? There are many constituents who are qualified to handle these jobs. They come to their councilmen, senators and delegates on the jobs. I'm told, with-

See BENCH, C6, Col. 2

BCSO Sheriff Cogen Letter to AOC Security Chief Se

Uploaded by: Sam Cogen

Position: FAV

Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

Samuel Cogen, Sheriff

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Sean B. Wolcoff
Chief Of Security
Administrative Office of the Courts
Maryland Judicial Center
187 Harry S Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401

January 5, 2024

Dear Mr. Wolcoff,

I write to thank you for the conversations that you and your colleagues have had with me and my staff regarding our shared responsibility in protecting the courts of Baltimore City and the members of the Judiciary and the general public who access this public space each and every workday of the year.

Per our conversations, you will find herein this letter a general background on the legal background and the building infrastructure background in Baltimore City, along with my first proposal for how I believe we can best improve safety across the board with staffing changes.

Legal Background:

The Baltimore City Sheriff's Office (BCSO) staffs courts in Baltimore City to provide a secure and safe environment for the administration of justice. The role of the sheriff inside the courthouse is to keep order, preserve decorum, provide guidance on behavior rules within the courtroom, enforce said rules, serve court documents on parties within the courtroom, take persons into custody, oversee inmates in custody, transport prisoners to and from the courtroom, and provide other law enforcement services as needed.

In Baltimore City, court security is provided by three (3) classifications of BCSO employees. The first classification of sheriff employees is the deputy sheriff that has full law enforcement authority

throughout Baltimore City.¹ The Sheriff of Baltimore City is currently authorized to appoint 103 deputy sheriffs.²

The second classification of BCSO employee to conduct court security work is the sheriff court security officer (CSO).³ CSOs are, effectively, Circuit Court bailiffs who report directly to the Sheriff of Baltimore City, acting under his conferred authority as “Chief of Court House Security.”⁴ CSOs are peace officers vested with the powers of police officers not unlike special police or special deputies, which they may exercise within any building used in whole or in part by the Circuit Court for Baltimore City.⁵ CSOs duties and powers are limited and they may not perform “...any other duty not directly related to the functions of the Court and of the judge.”⁶

The third classification of BCSO employee who provides security is the “special deputy sheriff”. These employees were created and funded as contractual employees in addition to the 103 authorized deputy sheriffs to perform a specific function. In this case the specific function was to serve child support related writs and provide security to the judges hearing child support work. These positions were partially funded at one time by a cooperative reimbursement agreement (CRA) with the Maryland Department of Human Services. Historically, various Sheriffs of Baltimore City at times created significant numbers of special deputies with full police authority. There has been no legislation limiting this authority.

Court operations generate derivative work for the BCSO to conduct throughout the City of Baltimore. Such work is required for the Court to function effectively, to exercise court jurisdiction, and to enforce court orders. For example, bench warrants for “violation of probation,” “failure to appear,” and “body attachments” are forwarded to the BCSO for process service and to locate and arrest persons. The BCSO also serves criminal and civil summonses and subpoenas for each operating Court.

From an operational perspective, such derivative work is only performed by Deputy Sheriffs with city-wide law enforcement jurisdiction. The more active the Courts are, the more work is generated and forwarded to the BCSO.

Building Infrastructure Background:

Baltimore City Circuit Court facilities are unique because they are historic buildings. Unlike modern court facilities that are designed with separate employee, prisoner, and public entrances, elevators, and corridors, The Mitchell Courthouse West and Cummings Courthouse East buildings have common hallways, elevators, and entrances, as well as an operational United States Post Office. This provides significant security challenges and requires multiple fixed position screening posts to secure the environment.

¹ See Md Cons. Art. IV, Part VII, and Md. Code Ann. Cts. & Jud. Proc. § 2-316, *generally*.

² Md. Code Ann. Cts. & Jud. Proc. § 2-316(d)(2)(ii).

³ Md. PLL Art. 4, §§ 22-6 through 22-11), *et. seq.*

⁴ Md. PLL Art. 4, § 22-6.

⁵ Md. PLL Art. 4, § 22-9.

⁶ *Id.*

Baltimore City Circuit Court public entrances are not Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant and each of the buildings, there is both a public entrance door and an ADA compliant door that both require screening and law enforcement staff. The ADA compliant doors also are used to screen court employees. The public entrance doors serve as the main exit doors. Along with security screening, the BCSO staff function as the initial source of information for providing directions to the public as to their intended destination.

BSCO employees screen the public entering the court with walk through magnetometers (metal detectors) and the belongings are screen by x-ray. The court employees are screened with metal detectors and their belongings are hand searched by the sheriff employees. Unrelated to staffing level recommendations, one recommended technological upgrade would be to place two (2) additional x-ray machines, one at each of the ADA doors.

BCSO also maintains three lock-up areas, one in each of the Circuit Courthouses with the third in the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) facility. In the Circuit Courthouses, adult prisoners who are awaiting trial and transferred into the custody of the court are placed in these lock-up areas. Pre-trial attorney visitation occurs in these areas and is supervised by BCSO staff.

Staffing Background:

As stated above, the core mission of the CSOs is to provide courthouse and courtroom security. Currently, the BCSO is funded for \$2,732,478 in salaries for thirty-six (37) full-time CSO positions.⁷ This means the CSOs have barely enough personnel to have one CSO for each of the thirty-three (33) Circuit Court judges. If you factor in the twelve (12) Magistrates in Baltimore City, the total shows there is insufficient personnel to put just one (1) CSO in each of the forty-nine (49) rooms that could potentially be holding hearings on any given day. And of course, this does not include the staff necessitated by the unique nature of the historical building infrastructure who cover the various security entry checkpoints and roving security needed to adequately secure the courthouse facilities.

I note that the insufficient staffing levels of CSOs is being covered, at present, by reassigning Deputy Sheriffs away from their other court mandated duties. Moreover, current courtroom and courthouse security staffing levels are following historic patterns, and I do not believe (and feedback from our judicial partners indicates to me that they also do not believe) that these historic levels of “protection” are in any way adequate to meet the current climate of judicial threats and court security that we are facing in Baltimore City and nationally.

As I mentioned, by backfilling the need to cover the CSO staffing inadequacies, all of the following court enforcement services are presently being severely diminished:

- Investigating/managing threats to judges and other employees of the Judiciary;
- Providing law enforcement and traffic enforcement in the courthouse footprint;
- Managing protest events around the courthouse facility;

⁷ See Baltimore City Budget Publications Fiscal 2024 Agency Detail, Volume II, Service 881: Courthouse Security, pg. 353-354, available at https://bbmr.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/FY2024%20Agency%20Detail%20Volume%202%20Final_1.pdf.

- Supplementing staff during high-risk/high-profile cases;
- Conducting witness protection details;
- Other law enforcement duties as services, when needed;
- Enforcing the Orders of the Court, including:
 - Circuit Court warrants and attachments;
 - Civil and Criminal summons and subpoenas;
 - Child support and other Family Court orders;
 - Circuit Court and District Court protective orders;
 - District Court peace orders;
 - District Court Evictions and Rent Court process service;
 - Circuit and District Court Civil Process; and
 - Other writs forwarded from Maryland Courts and other courts located outside of the State of Maryland involving a Baltimore City resident.

Security Recommendation Proposal:

With that background in mind, I recommend increasing the capacity of the CSO staff to 110 funded positions, with a mix of full-time (primarily command/supervisory roles) and contractual personnel, which will ensure adequate courthouse and courtroom security and allow Deputy Sheriffs to be reassigned to those above referenced Court enforcement services. And as the only employees of the BCSO with full law enforcement powers throughout the City, only the Deputy Sheriffs are authorized to lawfully and safely engage in such work.

Budget and Costs:

The BCSO total operating budget for Fiscal Year 2024 is \$27,770,906.⁸ Within that total operating budget, Service 881: Courthouse Security is budgeted for a total of \$5,600,344, which includes the aforementioned \$2,732,478 in salary costs for the currently funded thirty-seven (37) full-time CSO positions. As is broken down in further detail below, my security recommendation will result in an increased cost to Service 881, which amounts to an estimated funding shortfall in the range of approximately \$7.6 million over the existing level of funding.

Cost Breakdown:

Full-time Court Security Officers - currently paid between \$51,928 - \$87,221 with a \$20,000 benefits package. Full-time CSOs are budgeted with benefits at \$71,928 – \$107,221. Currently, there are 37 such funded positions.⁹

*Contractual Court Security Officers*¹⁰ – to be paid hourly at \$50.00 per hour with no benefits and work on a “part-time” schedule. This equates to \$400.00 per eight-hour shift. With 248 working days per year when courts are in session and at \$400 per shift this equates to \$99,200 per yearly

⁸ *Id.* at pg. 351.

⁹ *Id.* at fn. 7.

¹⁰ Note: no relief factor is needed here, because contractual CSO positions are scheduled and no leave is calculated. Contrast this with full-time CSOs with benefits who take an average of 20 days of leave per year, thus necessitating additional positions for coverage. The Department of Justice calculates this relief factor at 1.4 multiplied by each full-time position.

shift coverage. By way of example, two (2) such contractual CSOs covering a court room for an eight-hour shift, per workday, per year costs \$198,400.

Adding seventy-three (73) positions on top of the existing thirty-six (37)—assuming they are contractual at \$99,200 per position—creates an additional need for \$7,241,600 in salary expense. Because each position would require first year hiring, uniform, equipment, and training expenditures of approximately \$5,000 per unit, this would add an additional \$365,000 in anticipated one-time costs, bringing the total cost to \$7,605,600.

Given that, as stated above, the total budget for the BCSO in fiscal 2024 is \$27,770,906, this staffing proposal amounts to a 27% increase to the current overall budget of the BCSO.

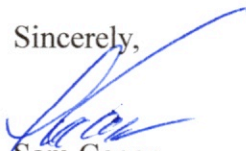
However, if, for example, it was decided to staff two (2) CSOs per judicial courtroom and one (1) CSO staffing each magistrate courtroom, this would reduce the number of CSO positions by twelve (12) and supervisory positions by one (1), lessening the total overall increase in needed positions to 60, which amounts to a \$5,952,000 funding shortfall that would need to be filled.

It is important to note that as the Chief of the Court House Security Division,¹¹ the Sheriff of Baltimore City will train all employees in-house as armed special deputies¹² and not certify them through the Maryland Police and Correctional Training and Standards Commission (MPTSC) unless they are already certified, which will significantly reduce the training costs. Certainly, there are more opportunities to realize additional cost savings as we think through how this initial plan can be improved upon.

Closing:

In closing, I remain grateful for your time and attention to this letter. Please know that I am happy to continue our dialogue as we work to reimagine the current BCSO's deployment to achieve our shared goal of providing the safest, most secure environment within and around the Circuit Courthouse facilities of Baltimore City. If you have any questions or wish to discuss this issue further, please contact me via Assistant Sheriff Nicholas Blendy, who is available at Nicholas.Blendy3@baltimorecity.gov.

Sincerely,



Sam Cogen
Sheriff of Baltimore City

¹¹ Md. PLL Art. 4, §§ 22-6, 22-8, and 22-10.

¹² Upon preliminary consultation with my in-house Assistant Sheriff counsel, I believe the law does not require CSOs to be MPTSC certified to exercise the limited policing powers that they are authorized under the Public Local Law. I will, of course, confirm this with our Assistant Attorney General, along with some other questions that I have regarding potential costs involving worker's compensation and liability, as well as whether they are entitled to qualified immunity.

SB0621 - MSBA Support Letter (2025.02.10).pdf

Uploaded by: Shaoli Sarkar

Position: FAV



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To: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA)
Subject: SB 621 – Courtroom Security - Minimum Adequate Security Standard
Date: February 10, 2025
Position: **Support**

The Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA) **supports** Senate Bill 621 – Courtroom Security - Minimum Adequate Security Standard. SB 621 establishes minimum adequate security standards for courtroom security at all courthouse facilities; requires, beginning July 1, 2026, the presence of a certain number of security officers in every court room during certain proceedings; and requires by July 1, 2028, in every court room, the presence of one court security officer for any proceeding, two court security officers for any proceeding involving an incarcerated individual, and one additional officer for every four or fewer courtrooms on each floor of a courthouse.

MSBA represents more attorneys than any other organization across the state in all practice areas. Through its advocacy committees and various practice-specific sections, MSBA monitors and takes positions on legislation that protects the legal profession, preserves the integrity of the judicial system, and ensures access to justice for Marylanders.

Judges and attorneys who regularly engage in high-conflict matters are at great risk of physical harm and threats. MSBA practitioners have shared experiences of:

- Surveillance and stalking by case parties to their offices and outside their homes,
- Not having any security in courtrooms during heated family law cases, where case facts indicate abuse and violence between litigants,
- Changing phone numbers, email addresses, and upgrading security systems in response to threats of violence from litigants, and
- Requesting security escorts to and from courthouses.

SB 621 would provide additional minimum security first to those high-conflict courtrooms, including criminal, juvenile, and family proceedings, and those involving an incarcerated individual, and then expand over two years to provide additional minimum security for all court proceedings. Maryland must adopt appropriate minimum security standards for courtroom security across the state to preserve the well-being of all Marylanders. Judges and attorneys just be able to decide and present cases without fear for their safety or for their family.

For these reasons, MSBA respectfully urges a **favorable report on Senate Bill 621**.

Contact: Shaoli Sarkar, Advocacy Director (shaoli@msba.org, 410-387-5606)

SB0621-JPR_MACo_SWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Sample

Position: FWA



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.

oppose SB621 Sheriff Gamble.pdf

Uploaded by: Sheriff Joe Gamble

Position: UNF



TALBOT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Joseph J. Gamble
Sheriff

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February 10, 2025

SB 621 Courtroom Security – Minimum Adequate Security Standard

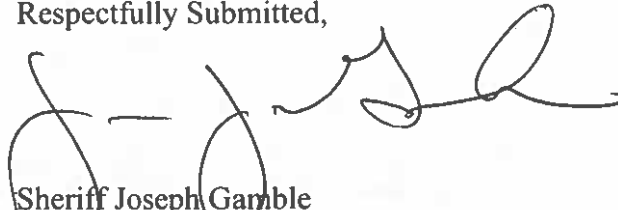
Position: **OPPOSE (UNF)**

The Talbot County Sheriff's Office opposes SB621 – Courtroom Security – Minimum Adequate Security Standard. We fully support providing adequate security for our courtrooms to ensure public safety, however, this bill is an unfunded mandate that would negatively impact our local budget and police services. We currently have five dedicated positions to serve in our Circuit Courts with one of those positions being a longstanding vacancy that has been a challenge to fill.

If this bill should pass, I would need to add four more deputies at a total cost of \$1,024,000 for a lateral deputy. To train a new deputy it would cost the county approximately \$100,000 for the first year. This added cost would include vehicles, training and equipment. Given the challenge of finding a deputy to fulfill my current vacancy, if this bill were to pass, I would be required to pull a deputy from a patrol or specialized unit to fill the unfunded mandated vacancy. This would have devastating consequences on the level of safety and support my office could provide for the community.

While I recognize this bill may not intend to have negative consequences on those of us in law enforcement, we would however face a continuum of challenges attempting to fill these positions with qualified deputies. I would humbly suggest letting the jurisdictional Circuit Judges and the elected Sheriffs of each county establish a guideline of minimum security standards instead of an unfunded mandate by the State. I hope that you will consider my testimony in your decision to oppose SB 621.

Respectfully Submitted,



Sheriff Joseph Gamble
Talbot County Sheriff

20250212 SB 0621 Courtroom Security Minimum Adequa

Uploaded by: Travis Breeding

Position: UNF



Senate Bill 621

Courtroom Security-Minimum Adequate Security Standard

Position: UNF

Date: **February 12, 2025**

To: **Judicial Proceedings**

On behalf of the Caroline County Commissioners, we wish to express our **strong opposition** for **Senate Bill 621, Courtroom Security—Minimum Adequate Security Standard**, which would impose new courtroom security requirements across Maryland. While we recognize the importance of maintaining safe and secure court facilities, this bill presents serious financial and staffing challenges for rural counties like ours.

Caroline County already faces significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining law enforcement officers. With law enforcement agencies across the state struggling to fill vacancies, this unfunded mandate would only increase the strain on our resources. Hiring and training additional court security officers will not only be expensive but may also divert personnel from other critical public safety duties.

The bill mandates a substantial increase in security staffing requirements by 2026 and further escalates them by 2028. For a small county like Caroline, this means a sharp rise in costs for personnel salaries, training, and benefits—without any identified state funding assistance. Additionally, the requirement for multiple officers per proceeding and per floor places an undue burden on our already limited workforce.

We urge the committee to consider the practical implications of this bill for rural jurisdictions. At a minimum, the state should provide dedicated funding to assist counties in meeting these new standards. Otherwise, this mandate will force counties to reprioritize limited resources, potentially affecting other essential services.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and respectfully request that you oppose Senate Bill 621 in its current form. If security enhancements are deemed necessary, they should be accompanied by adequate financial support and flexibility to ensure counties can implement them without undue hardship.

Sincerely,

J. Travis Breeding, President

MCPA - MSA SB 621 Minimum Adequate Security Standa

Uploaded by: Samira Jackson

Position: INFO



Maryland Chiefs of Police Association Maryland Sheriffs' Association



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith Jr., Chair and
Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Darren Popkin, Executive Director, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Samira Jackson, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

DATE: February 12, 2025

RE: **SB 621 Courtroom Security – Minimum Adequate Security Standard**

POSITION: **LETTER OF INFORMATION**

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) provide a letter on information on SB 621 for consideration by the committee. This bill establishes a minimum adequate security standard for all courthouse facilities in the State.

SB 575, (CH. Acts of 2024) established the Task Force to Ensure the Safety of Judicial Facilities to identify the minimum requirements for courthouse safety in different settings within the courthouse and to develop a legislative proposal to ensure the requirements can be met. Three Sheriffs served on this Task Force and SB 621 reflects its recommendations.

The additional staffing requirements recommended by the Task Force are costly. During Task Force deliberations it was discussed that these new requirements should be funded by the State and not place an unfunded mandate on the Sheriffs' Offices and local governments.

Maintaining the security of our courthouse is extremely important, but these requirements should only be implemented as State funds become available.