



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**SPONSOR TESTIMONY**

**SB889 Criminal Law - Distribution of Students Personal Information - Prohibition**

Chairman Smith and Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce and provide key details regarding SB889 Criminal Law - Distribution of Students Personal Information - Prohibition

For the record, I am Senator Shaneka Helson from the 30th Legislative District of Anne Arundel County, MD.

For those of you who may be unfamiliar with the term “doxxing” – it means....” the action or process of searching for and intentionally maliciously publishing private or identifying information about a particular individual.....on the internet.

We also know today that students of all ages are among the most vulnerable to be preyed upon – by classmates, outside sources and trolls. For example, last December, the University of Maryland received two egregious doxxing cases that led to death threats against UMD students. Upon further investigation UMD campus police confirmed that the state of Maryland currently has NO anti-doxxing laws to protect students.

The purpose of SB889 is to prohibit a person or groups from distributing personal identifying information or images of a student enrolled in an institution of secondary education or an institution of postsecondary education with intent or knowledge that the information will be used to harm the student; or with reckless disregard for the risk that the information will be used to harm the student. It makes the person who violates this Act guilty of a misdemeanor crime and is subject to imprisonment of up to 1 year or a fine of up to \$5,000 or both.

SB 889 offers vital protections by:

1. Prohibiting the intentional distribution of students' personal identifying information without consent if done with malicious intent or reckless disregard for harm.
2. Recognizing the severe emotional, psychological, and physical risks that result from doxxing.

3. Establishing clear legal consequences for perpetrators, ensuring accountability and deterrence.
4. Reaffirming First Amendment rights by balancing protections against targeted harassment with free speech considerations.

Why do we need this? Maryland current laws against cyberstalking and harassment, have many gaps and simply do not go far enough. For example, “Grace’s Law” was originally enacted in October 2013 to address the changing digital landscape, making the misuse of internet-based communications to intimidate or harass a minor a criminal offense. It was enacted in response to the tragic suicide of Grace McComas, a 15-year-old girl from Howard County, Maryland, who was cyberbullied relentlessly before taking her own life in 2012. Her parents, especially her mother Christine McComas advocated for stronger laws against online harassment and cyberbullying after discovering that Grace had been subjected to months of persistent online abuse through social media.

The 2013 version of Grace’s Law.

- Made repeated and malicious electronic harassment of a minor a misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$500 fine.
- Criminalized the use of electronic communications to cause a minor serious emotional distress or fear for their safety.

In 2019, Grace’s Law was strengthened by increasing penalties for cyberbullying and expanding protections for minors. It:

- Increased the maximum penalty to three years in prison and a \$10,000 fine for cases where electronic communications cause serious emotional distress to a minor.
- Covered indirect harassment, including when a third party is encouraged to harass someone.
- Applied to social media, email, and text messages, recognizing the evolving nature of online abuse.

Senate Bill 889 seeks to build on Grace’s Law and provide protections for students in both secondary and post-secondary education.

After you hear today’s panelists' experiences, I urge you to give this SB889 a favorable vote.

Zainab Chaudry, Pharm.D - Director, CAIR Maryland  
Rachel Turner-Siewert (Parent)  
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