



---

**Working to end sexual violence in Maryland**

P.O. Box 8782  
Silver Spring, MD 20907  
Phone: 301-565-2277  
Fax: 301-565-3619

For more information contact:  
Lisae C. Jordan, Esquire  
443-995-5544  
[www.mcasa.org](http://www.mcasa.org)

**Testimony Opposing House Bill 544**  
**Lisae C. Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel**  
February 11, 2025

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence. We urge an unfavorable report on House Bill 544.

**House Bill 544 – Third Degree Assault**

This bill would create the crime of 3<sup>rd</sup> assault and a definition of “offensive contact.” We very much appreciate the efforts to address concerns regarding survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and domestically related crimes. Nonetheless, we question the need for this particular solution to issues in the courts.

MCASA remains concerned that offensive contact can include serious and frightening behavior by people engaged in sexual harassment or other dominating behavior. While the bill does exclude an actual sexual offense or offenses in domestic situations, it could include things like:

- placing hands around another person's neck and pushing them up against the wall without causing physical harm;
- dragging a person around the floor without causing harm;
- hitting and pushing while screaming “I’m going to hurt you.”

Some of this may or may not fall under the exception for “contact that causes a risk of serious physical injury”, but the uncertainty of this illustrates one of the problems with the bill. Second degree assault as a charge is appropriately flexible and allows courts to consider a range of human factors. Additionally, it is questionable whether the bill will actually reduce litigation, since defendants will have a right to a *de novo* appeal. MCASA respectfully suggests that this bill fixes a problem that does not actually need fixing.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault urges the  
Judiciary Committee to report unfavorably on House Bill 544**

