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Subcommittees

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Public Health and Minority Health Disparities

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SUPPORT – HB444 CRIMINAL LAW – PUBLIC SAFETY – INTERFERENCE WITH CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OR PUBLIC SAFETY ANSWERING – PENALTIES

February 4, 2025

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

HB444 strengthens existing protections of the broad range of critical communications infrastructure against the increasing number of cyber and other threats, by creating specific penalties for those who seek to undermine these systems by intentional actions aimed at disrupting or impairing their function. **HB444**, a recommendation of the Next Gen 9-1-1 Commission and a 2022 Judiciary and Judicial Proceedings Workgroup, informed by prior local and national cyberattacks, aims to deter future bad actors and improve accountability. It broadens the type of digital systems subject to penalties beyond 9-1-1 systems known as Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs), which is the subject of a separate bill, HB445, which passed this committee and the House 135-0 in 2023 and 141-0 in 2024.

In Maryland, the 2019 Baltimore ransomware attack disabled city systems for weeks, disrupting essential services and costing $18 million in recovery efforts. A Baltimore County Public Schools 2020 attack halted remote learning for 115,000 students, highlighting the vulnerabilities of our educational systems. In 2023, a Microsoft outage stemming from vulnerabilities in cloud-based systems disrupted critical operations globally for hours, delaying over 3,500 flights, temporarily disabling airline communication systems, and causing widespread service interruptions for banks, airlines, and major corporations. The 2021 Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack disrupted East Coast fuel supplies for almost a week, costing over $4 million and sparking widespread economic and public safety concerns. The cost of the ransomware attack on the Maryland Department of Health, for which there was a rapid response that preserved data security took nearly two years for system recovery at immeasurable human cost. These incidents exemplify the profound impact cyberattacks can have on government operations, communities, and individuals.

HB444

- defines “CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE” as both physical or virtual systems and assets, vital to the state, county, or municipality for which incapacitation or destruction of one or more components would have a debilitating impact on public security, economic security, public health, or public safety.
- explicitly targets modern cyber threats, including ransomware and denial-of-service attacks, ensuring that Maryland's laws remain aligned with current and emerging risks.
- creates a felony with clear, enforceable penalties of up to **5 years and up to $25,000** or both for actions **intending** to and **up to 10 years and up to $50,000** or both for actions which succeed in interrupt or impair the functioning of critical infrastructure with malicious intent.

While federal initiatives like CISA and companies like CrowdStrike have advanced cybersecurity, they do not and cannot ensure security to these systems. In fact, CrowdStrike software update was itself subject to

a July 2024 attack causing a widespread IT outage that affected millions of Windows computers worldwide.

HB444 is an essential deterrence, response, and accountability tool needed to protect Maryland's critical infrastructure and better safeguard the health, safety, and security of our residents.

I ask for a favorable report on **HB444**.