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Legislative District 41
Baltimore City

Health and Government Operations
Committee

Chair

Health Occupations and
Long-Term Care Subcommittee

House Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review



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Testimony of Delegate Samuel I Rosenberg

Before the Judiciary Committee

In Support of

House Bill 0434

Courts - Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation

Chair Clippinger and Members of the Committee,

I testify in support of House Bill 434 which would modernize and strengthen Maryland's protections against frivolous lawsuits. Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP suits) are baseless lawsuits designed to intimidate and silence individuals who engage in public discourse. HB 434 would ensure these abuses are addressed and that Marylanders can exercise their First Amendment rights without fear of legal retaliation.

SLAPP suits have been weaponized against community members, journalists, and advocacy groups. A notable example occurred when Baltimore residents were sued for \$25 million in punitive damages simply for testifying against a proposed development. Maryland's current anti-SLAPP law has proven inadequate in preventing such abuses, earning a "D" rating from the Public Participation Project. HB 434 strengthens our statute by removing the burdensome "bad faith" requirement, expediting court rulings on SLAPP motions, and allowing defendants to recover legal fees if a case is dismissed as a SLAPP suit.

These reforms align Maryland's law with those of over 30 other states that have enacted robust anti-SLAPP protections. They also ensure that individuals targeted by baseless lawsuits are not financially or emotionally drained simply for exercising their constitutional rights. The ability to petition the government and engage in public discourse must be safeguarded, not threatened by legal intimidation tactics.

Last year, similar legislation passed the House but did not receive a vote in the Senate. Now is the time to take action. Strengthening our anti-SLAPP statute will protect Marylanders from frivolous lawsuits designed to suppress free speech. I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 434 and move Maryland toward stronger protections for civic engagement.

Hearing: Wednesday, February, 12th.