



Maryland State's Attorneys' Association

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DATE: **January 17, 2025**

BILL NUMBER: **HB 177**

POSITION: **Unfavorable**

The Maryland State's Attorneys' Association (MSAA) opposes House Bill 177 and urges this Committee to issue an unfavorable report.

HB 177 is one of a number of bills introduced this session – including HB 64, HB 126, HB 135, HB 143, HB 210, HB 280, and HB 291 – that deal with the theft of mail. This bill criminalizes the theft of mail as a felony offense, and provides for a maximum sentence of five years in prison. The bill also requires a court to notify the Postmaster General of a conviction of theft of mail or of unlawfully opening a letter, with the administrative costs of such notification to be paid by the defendant.

Although MSAA recognizes the disruptive effects of mail theft, and can appreciate that the harm caused by the theft of important mail is often greatly in excess of the value of the piece of mail itself, the maximum sentence proposed by HB 177 is excessive. Treating the theft of a letter or package as equivalent to the theft of property with a value of up to \$25,000, regardless of the actual value of the letter or package stolen, is disproportionate and leads to absurd results – because of the special status HB 177 affords letters and packages, a perpetrator who steals a package containing, say, an inexpensive lawn decoration would be subject to felony criminal liability, while a perpetrator who commits the same offense after the decoration has been removed from the package and placed in the lawn would not. The law, as it exists, affords prosecutors adequate tools to bring perpetrators who would steal valuable letters and packages to justice.