



TESTIMONY FOR HB0544

Criminal Law – Third–Degree Assault

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Lehman

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative

Coalition **Person Submitting:** Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0544 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

The purpose of HB0544 is to establish that it is a misdemeanor to intentionally cause offensive contact, engage in conduct tending to put another in fear of offensive contact, or attempt to cause offensive contact. This bill is long overdue, with a version first being introduced in 2018.

Acting as a deterrent, this law ensures that no one is subject to unwanted physical contact. A feeling of safety is promoted, especially for the vulnerable and marginalized who may be disproportionately affected by such behavior. Ultimately this can alleviate the stress, anxiety, and trauma experienced by victims, leading to better mental health outcomes. These are important values shared by our members.

A person who violates this section is guilty of the misdemeanor of assault in the third degree and on conviction is subject to imprisonment not exceeding 90 days or a fine not exceeding \$500 or both. Yet for those who have completed their sentence and/or fine, a petition for expungement can be filed 7 years later. Thus, not having to continue to be negatively impacted by an earlier transgression.

The Maryland Legislative Coalition steadfastly supports this bill and similar initiatives that help to assure personal safety free from fear.