



Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.

Continuing the Missions of the Stephanie Roper Committee and Foundation, Inc.

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Testimony in Opposition to Maryland House Bill 544: Criminal Law – Third-Degree Assault

Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed bill regarding assault classifications. With over 17 years of experience as an attorney, including my time as a prosecutor in Washington State, California, and Maryland, I have witnessed firsthand the complexities of the criminal justice system. My four and a half years as a Senior Attorney at the California Department of State Hospitals further deepened my understanding of the urgent need for effective victim advocacy. Currently, as the Deputy Director at MCVRC, I find immense purpose in supporting crime victims through their most challenging moments, and I urge you to consider their needs in your discussions.

The victims and survivors we represent in Maryland's courts do not see a case for a lesser degree of assault; they deserve robust protections under the law. Assault already captures a wide spectrum of criminal behavior—ranging from attempted assault to harmful or offensive contact, including actions such as slapping, hitting, kicking, punching, or using a weapon. Our victims need judges who can wield the existing legal tools effectively to prevent further acts of violence or intimidation.

While second-degree assault in Maryland can carry a maximum penalty of ten years in prison, this approach is often undermined by infrequent incarceration, leaving many cases to languish on STET dockets. Additionally, the behaviors prohibited by second-degree assault overlap with those outlined in a proposed third-degree assault charge. Introducing a third-degree classification not only complicates the legal framework but also risks watering down protections for victims.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to find this bill unfavorable. The focus should remain on enforcing the current laws effectively to ensure the safety and dignity of all individuals affected by violent crime.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter.

Sincerely,

Joanna D. Mupanduki
Deputy Director