

Thank you Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I'm [ST, VP of PP] with the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (AKA RAINN).
RAINN is.....

No one should be forced to stay silent after a sexual assault. But existing laws in Maryland fail to protect survivors from targeted lawsuits designed to silence them, and their experiences.

We're proud to stand alongside survivors like Victoria, here remotely, who speak out about the violence they experienced and are fighting to ensure that others can do so.

Survivors face significant barriers to reporting or speaking out. They fear not being believed or being blamed for their assault.

In Maryland, they also fear a costly and lengthy legal battle if they decide to speak their truth.

Perpetrators use the courts to punish survivors for speaking out about abuse, further victimizing those who come forward.

Rapists weaponize these lawsuits to discredit survivors, shifting the focus away from the abuse and the rapist and placing it on the survivor's actions.

Survivors of sexual assault face defamation lawsuits from powerful individuals or organizations. This creates an unequal legal battle, where survivors often lack the financial resources to defend themselves against high-profile defendants with significant legal teams.

EXAMPLES: Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, Dr. Luke, etc.

In New York (*Sagaille v. Carrega* 2022), an appellate court frankly admitted that "sexual assaults remain vastly under reported, primarily due to victims' fear of

retaliation. It does not escape [the Court] that defamation suits like the instant one may constitute a form of retaliation against those with the courage to speak out.”

While Maryland currently has an anti-SLAPP law, it is narrow and does not protect survivors from retaliatory defamation lawsuits.

This bill will ensure that survivors can speak out without fear of retaliation or costly legal fees.

Maryland survivors who speak out deserve your protection.

I hope you will report HB 629 favorably. Thank you.