

Chair Senator Brian J. Feldman  
Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

February 24, 2026

**Re: Advance Key Legislation to Protect the Personal Information of State Officeholders**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment,

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law<sup>1</sup> appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of SB 632—which seeks to protect the personal information of state officeholders—with amendments designed to balance individual speech rights with a healthy democracy. For over thirty years, the Brennan Center’s nonpartisan expertise has informed policies that safeguard our democracy, including measures that ensure election workers and state and local officeholders can fulfill their civic duties without fear of violence or abuse.

Last year marked an inflection point in the rise of political violence following the murder of Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband.<sup>2</sup> Senator John Hoffman and his wife were critically injured in the attack, with dozens more officeholders on the assailant’s list.<sup>3</sup> In September, Charlie Kirk was assassinated at Utah Valley University during a debate.<sup>4</sup> And

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<sup>1</sup> The Brennan Center is a nonpartisan public policy and law institute that focuses on the fundamental issues of democracy and justice and for thirty years has studied, litigated, and developed policy solutions regarding money in politics, voting, and election administration. The opinions expressed in this testimony are only those of the Brennan Center and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NYU School of Law.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Boyette, “A ‘Formidable Public Servant.’ Who Was Melissa Hortman, the Minnesota State Representative Assassinated in Her Home?” CNN, June 15, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/14/us/melissa-hortman-minnesota-assassination>.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Karnowski, “Minnesota Shooting Suspect Had a List of Dozens of Potential Democratic Targets, Prosecutors Say,” *PBS NewsHour*, June 17, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/minnesota-shooting-suspect-had-a-list-of-dozens-of-potential-democratic-targets-prosecutors-say>.

<sup>4</sup> “What to Know About the Aftermath of Charlie Kirk’s Assassination,” *PBS NewsHour*, *Associated Press*, September 15, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/what-to-know-about-the-aftermath-of-charlie-kirks-assassination>.

immediately after, Maryland House Speaker Adrienne Jones and Senate President Bill Ferguson received credible bomb threats to their homes.<sup>5</sup>

Attacks targeting Maryland public officials certainly preceded 2025, and this body acted swiftly to implement protective measures in response. On October 19, 2023, Maryland Circuit Court Judge Andrew Wilkinson was fatally shot in the driveway of his home<sup>6</sup> by an individual involved in a divorce proceeding.<sup>7</sup> This Legislature unanimously passed the Judge Andrew Wilkinson Judicial Security Act the following year, which provides protections for judges in the state to have their personal information removed from online databases, creates the Judicial Address Confidentiality Program, and establishes a task force to ensure the safety of judicial facilities.<sup>8</sup> As Governor Moore put it, “We need to make sure that people who raise their hands to serve us, that we are protecting them as much as possible.”<sup>9</sup>

We urge this Committee to similarly act without delay in meeting this critical moment by passing SB 632 with amendments that protect free speech while ensuring state officeholders can safely and securely continue to represent the constituency they serve.

### **Research demonstrates a prevailing threat environment for state and local officeholders that negatively impacts representation.**

The Brennan Center’s 2024 report on the rising levels of abuse directed at state and local officeholders revealed the scope and damaging impact of violence.<sup>10</sup> We fielded two national surveys—one of state legislators and four quarterly surveys of local officeholders—and conducted three dozen in-depth interviews with state legislators. Our report represents the experiences of over 1,700 officials from all 50 states as well as a range of ages, party affiliations, ideologies, genders, sexual orientations, racial and ethnic identities, and religions. Over 40 percent of state officeholders surveyed reported experiencing threats or physical attacks over the past three years, and nearly 90 percent reported experiencing insults or harassment during the same period. Women and people of color reported higher levels of abuse compared to their

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<sup>5</sup> Bryan P. Sears and Steve Crane, “Bomb Threats, Lockdowns: A State on Edge in Wake of Charlie Kirk Killing,” *Maryland Matters*, September 12, 2025, <https://marylandmatters.org/2025/09/12/bomb-threats-lockdowns-a-state-on-edge-in-wake-of-charlie-kirk-killing/>

<sup>6</sup> Emily Shapiro, “Pedro Argote, Man Who Allegedly Killed Maryland Judge Andrew Wilkinson, Found Dead: Officials,” *ABCNews*, October 26, 2023, <https://abcnews.com/US/pedro-argote-man-allegedly-killed-maryland-judge-andrew/story?id=104219693>.

<sup>7</sup> William J. Ford, “Slain Judge’s Wife Urges Md. Lawmakers to ‘Make Things Right’ to Protect Judicial Officials,” *Maryland Matters*, January 31, 2024, <https://marylandmatters.org/2024/01/31/slain-judges-wife-urges-md-lawmakers-to-make-things-right-to-protect-judicial-officials/>.

<sup>8</sup> *Senate Bill 575*, 2024 Regular Session, Maryland General Assembly, <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/bills/sb/sb0575T.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> “Maryland Judges’ Personal Information Protected Under Bill Passed by Senate After Fatal Shooting,” *Yahoo! News*, February 8, 2024, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/gov-wes-moore-signs-privacy-194759132.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Gowri Ramachandran et al., *Intimidation of State and Local Officeholders*, Brennan Center for Justice, January 25, 2024, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/intimidation-state-and-local-officeholders>.

peers. Republican legislators were more likely to report an increase in severity of abuse since taking office, compared to Democrats.

Many legislators shared stories of the impact of violence on their families. Over 20 percent of state legislators surveyed reported abusive language targeted at their children and families, with women and people of color even more likely to report this abuse targeting their families, as compared to white or male colleagues. One female legislator we interviewed said, “They don’t directly say, ‘I’m going to kill her children.’ But they’ll make comments like, ‘We’re going to take over her home. Here’s the address. Here’s a photo of it. She lives here in [town], but her kids don’t go to school in [town] — they go in [neighboring town].” About half of state legislators surveyed said they believed colleagues were declining to run for re-election or higher office as a result of abuse. One state legislator in New Mexico told reporters, ““Is it worth me putting my family at risk because I vote a certain way, I espouse certain ideals?””<sup>11</sup>

### **Increased threat environments undermine our democratic institutions and civic participation.**

Our research also revealed the indirect ways in which political violence harms democracy. About 20 percent of state legislators said abuse made them less willing to advocate for contentious issues. Approximately half of officeholders reported being less likely to engage on social media as a result of abuse. American democracy depends on the ability of our electeds to represent their constituents. When legislators limit engagement with the public, both in person and online, and constrict their policy agenda for fear of violence, democratic representation is weakened as a result.

### **Measures like extending confidentiality protections to state lawmakers can create a safer environment for them to deliver for their constituents.**

Individual officeholders should not be left to manage abuse on their own. State governments play a critical role in ensuring the democratic arena is safe and accessible for all.

We support a statewide address confidentiality program for public officials as SB 632 seeks to accomplish. Many states already allow private citizens and public servants to keep addresses and other personal information private, when it might expose them to risk. Forty one states offer address confidentiality to survivors of domestic violence, and twenty one states offer address confidentiality for officeholders.<sup>12</sup> Given the number of recent attacks targeting electeds and their families at their homes and the disparate impact of these attacks on women, people of color, and other marginalized groups, address confidentiality represents an important way to prevent attacks on electeds as well as family members.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Nott, "Lawmakers worry Albuquerque attacks will cool desire to run for office," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, January 17, 2024, [https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local\\_news/lawmakers-worry-albuquerque-attacks-will-cool-desire-to-run-for-office/article\\_2827fd88-9681-11ed-b434-3bcca7a1a90d.html](https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/lawmakers-worry-albuquerque-attacks-will-cool-desire-to-run-for-office/article_2827fd88-9681-11ed-b434-3bcca7a1a90d.html).

<sup>12</sup> Safety Net Project, "Address Confidentiality Programs," accessed February 23, 2026, <https://www.techsafety.org/address-confidentiality-programs>.

We also strongly support the following amendments: In light of the loose use of the term “doxing” in the current threat environment, as well as the importance of free speech, we recommend eliminating punitive damages and criminal penalties altogether, particularly if the law contains no requirement that an individual intended harm to incur these penalties. Maryland has robust criminal laws in place if the actions lead to assault, harassment, or trespass. These amendments would strike an appropriate balance between personal liberties and a healthy democracy, by focusing on mandatory redaction of personally identifiable information by public agencies, alongside voluntary removal by data brokers of personal information.

We also support an amendment to ensure residency requirements for officeholders can be enforced. For example, under California’s address confidentiality program, inspections of records are allowed by state and local government agencies<sup>13</sup> pursuant to an investigative<sup>14</sup> or regulatory need.

In addition to address confidentiality programs, there are other important steps this Committee can take to keep officeholders safe. Physical security resources and trainings, access to mental health services for officeholders and their families, and systems for collecting data and monitoring threats all work to better ensure the safety of officeholders and their families.<sup>15</sup> States around the country have already implemented some of these steps.

These recommendations are not exhaustive. This Legislature must continue to assess the threat of political violence and intimidation, how it destabilizes our democratic institutions, and what steps Maryland can take to mitigate this perilous problem. Passing SB 632 with amendments is a critical step this Legislature can take right now to better protect officeholders from future threats and ensure they can safely and effectively serve their constituents.

Respectfully submitted,

Celina Avalos Jaramillo, Advocacy Campaign Strategist  
Dr. Maya Kornberg, Senior Research Fellow and Manager

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<sup>13</sup> Brock Zimmon (Senior Deputy District Attorney), Re: Allegations Regarding Supervisor Do’s Residency in Relation to the First District Seat on the Orange County Board of Supervisors, District Attorney Investigations Case No. S.A. 15-115, Oct 5, 2015, <https://voiceofoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Supervisor-Andrew-Do-Residency-Investigation.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Office of the District Attorney of Orange County. 2025. “Former Irvine City Councilmember Tammy Kim Charged with Multiple Felonies for Lying about Her Residency while Serving on City Council, Running for Mayor.” May 22, 2025. <https://orangecountyda.org/press/former-irvine-city-councilmember-tammy-kim-charged-with-multiple-felonies-for-lying-about-her-residency-while-serving-on-city-council-running-for-mayor/>.

<sup>15</sup> Gowri Ramachandran et al., *Intimidation of State and Local Officeholders*.