

KATIE FRY HESTER
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Howard and Montgomery Counties

Education, Energy, and
Environment Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB121 - Personal Information - Public Servant Protections

February 10, 2026

Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of SB121, which would allow public servants to request that their personal information not be published on the Internet, social media, or social networks, and request the removal of previous publications of their personal information.

In July 2025, Vance Boelter, a Minnesota resident, carried out a targeted act of political violence, shooting Minnesota Senator John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette Hoffman, and killing former Minnesota House Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark Hortman, in their homes. My heart goes out to the Hortman and Hoffman families for their unimaginable loss and suffering; we honor the memory of Melissa and Mark.

Boelter had used a publicly accessible databroker website to obtain personal information about these lawmakers, including addresses, phone numbers, and details about their families. Upon his arrest, authorities discovered a notebook in his possession containing the names of 45 additional Democratic legislators, as well as multiple public databases where this information could be found.¹ Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Superintendent Drew Evans indicated that, without intervention, the violence could have continued.² This tragic event underscores the grave risks faced by public officials and reinforces the urgent need for enhanced security measures for those in public service, whose roles inherently place them in the public eye and often expose them to targeted threats.

The tragic events in Minnesota are not isolated, but rather part of a broader, concerning trend of escalating political polarization and violence. According to a January 2025 report from the

¹ <https://www.wired.com/story/minnesota-lawmaker-shootings-people-search-data-brokers/>

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<https://www.npr.org/2025/06/16/nx-s1-5433748/minnesota-shooting-suspect-vance-boelter-arrested-melissa-hortman-john-hoffman>

Brennan Center for Justice, over 40% of lawmakers surveyed indicated they had experienced threats or attacks in the past three years. This growing threat has created an atmosphere of fear, discouraging both prospective and current legislators from continuing public service. In Maryland, this reality became painfully clear after the Minnesota killings, with many lawmakers questioning whether the risks to their personal safety make public office worth the cost.³ This concern is not unfounded: in September 2025, both House Speaker Adrienne Jones and Senate President Bill Ferguson received bomb threats at their homes.⁴ This highlights the critical need for legislation that ensures the safety and security of public officials, whose roles inherently place them at risk.

SB121 addresses this critical concern in several key ways:

1. Defines “protected individuals” as those working in service of the State, including prosecutors, law enforcement, elected officials, and their household members, and specifies what personal information may not be publicly disclosed without consent;
2. Authorizes protected individuals to request non-publication of private information, or removal within 72 hours of already published private information;
3. Allows for a protected individual to bring action for relief in the event of a violation, and allows for the possibility of punitive damages if an individual willingly refuses to remove sensitive information; and
4. Establishes the Public Servant Address Confidentiality Program to be administered by the Secretary of State, allowing protected individuals to publish approved substitute addresses in place of their real addresses;

This idea is not unprecedented— in fact, this bill was modeled after the Judge Andrew F. Wilkinson Judicial Security Act, which protects judicial officers in the State, and which the General Assembly passed unanimously in 2024. Additionally, other states have similar protections in place: Arizona,⁵ Florida,⁶ and New Jersey⁷ all prevent the distribution of public officials’ personal information in much the same manner as SB121.

It is essential that Maryland’s elected lawmakers are able to perform their duties and legislate effectively on behalf of their constituents without the fear of retaliation or harm. Senate Bill 121 establishes critical safeguards by setting clear privacy protections, enhancing security measures,

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<https://marylandmatters.org/2025/09/11/state-lawmakers-reconsider-cost-purpose-of-serving-after-minnesota-assassination/>

⁴ <https://www.wmar2news.com/local/bomb-threats-made-to-homes-of-maryland-house-speaker-senate-president>

⁵ <https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/13/02401.htm>

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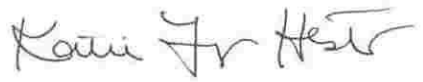
https://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URI=0100-0199/0119/Sections/0119.071.html

⁷ <https://danielslaw.nj.gov/Default.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f>

and providing avenues for relief in cases of violations. This legislation ensures that public servants can fulfill their responsibilities to the fullest extent, without jeopardizing the safety and well-being of themselves or their families.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB121.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K" and "F".

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Montgomery Counties