

## Testimony on SB183: Public Safety - Maryland Cyber Reserve - Established

Committee: Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee Testimony on SB-0183

Position: Informational Only

Hearing Date: February 11, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee, and thank you for this opportunity to speak in an informational capacity about SB183 and the establishment of a Maryland Cyber Reserve.

The UC Berkeley Center for Long-Term Cybersecurity's (CLTC) works to help individuals and organizations address tomorrow's information security challenges and amplify the upside of the digital revolution. We cofounded and chair the Consortium of Cybersecurity Clinics, a collective of over 43 colleges and universities in the U.S., including University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), and over 57 worldwide that provide free cybersecurity risk assessments and recommendations to nonprofits, small critical infrastructure, fire departments, schools, cities, and towns.

CLTC is also the largest convener of cyber volunteering organizations in the country; we co-chair the Cyber Resilience Corps, which strengthens volunteer efforts to deliver real, hands-on cybersecurity support where it's needed most. We have a birds-eye view of these programs nationwide, and are currently tracking over 66 state, county, or city-based cyber defense programs. We regularly work with states to share best practices and improve the services and connectivity of cyber volunteering programs.

CLTC is focused on regional cyber capacity-building programs like these because community organizations often cannot afford to protect themselves against cyberattacks, which disrupt critical human services for residents. In fact, 34% of state and local governments experienced a ransomware attack in 2024<sup>1</sup>, and there was a 70% increase in attacks on U.S. utilities from the same period in 2023 to 2024.<sup>2</sup> The ongoing cost of cybersecurity far exceeds the budgets available to most small organizations, which also often lack the in-house cyber expertise to protect themselves from cyberattacks.

Through CLTC's work, we have seen the **power of expert volunteers to fill critical gaps in cybersecurity** services nationwide:

- Cybersecurity clinics have served over 700 client organizations.
- As of May 2025, there are approximately 3,900 cyber volunteers in the U.S. spread across 50 volunteer groups serving around 500 client organizations per year.

Cyber reserve teams are no longer experimental or pilot programs; they follow well-trodden paths that have been in place for many years in several states. As of 2025, cyber reserve programs are operational in Michigan, Wisconsin, Texas, Ohio, Virginia, and Louisiana, and new programs are developing in Oklahoma, Washington, and New Jersey.

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<sup>1</sup> 2024 Ransomware Report: Sophos State of Ransomware.

<sup>2</sup> Daren, Seher and Vallari Srivastava. "Cyberattacks on US Utilities Surged 70% This Year, Says Check Point" | Reuters, 11 Sept. 2024.

These cyber reserve programs typically provide both proactive (pre-incident) and reactive (post-incident) services, including: (1) education and training; (2) vulnerability and risk assessments; and (3) on-call expertise, incident response, and recovery efforts. These services in the private marketplace can cost in the tens of thousands of dollars, which is unaffordable for most small cities, towns, and utilities. Cyber reserve teams help ensure these public organizations get the assistance they could not otherwise afford.

In addition to serving the community, cyber reserve teams can provide several benefits to the states that run them, most notably by saving taxpayer money by reducing the costs of cybersecurity incidents to local governments and critical infrastructure. For example, **for every \$1 spent on the Wisconsin Cyber Reserve Team (CRT), volunteers saved cyber victims \$1.40** in costs such as incident response and recovery. These programs can also improve a state's cyber resilience by training critical infrastructure operators and remediating vulnerabilities, creating surge capacity in the event of a regional or statewide cyber emergency, and enhancing a state's cybersecurity workforce.

Cyber reserve teams can readily complement other established state cyber defense programs. A cyber reserve corps could coordinate with the Maryland Defense Force (MDDF) to ensure local governments receive the same standard of care as state agencies, as well as partner with MDEM's Cyber Preparedness Unit to expand the delivery of a range of services like cyber incident response training and rewriting emergency operations plans. A cyber reserve team could also recruit from the strong student pipeline at the cyber clinic at UMBC and the two clinics soon to be established through the Cyber and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Pilot Clinic Grant Initiative from the Maryland Department of Labor.

However, there are several hurdles that cyber reserve programs need to overcome, including managing liability, building trust with localities, and recruiting, vetting, and maintaining a corps of volunteers. Existing cyber reserve programs have addressed these in different ways, and CLTC would be glad to connect any Committee members to counterparts in other states to share their solutions.

We also want to highlight the role of civil society in providing essential human services like housing assistance, food access, youth development programs, and disaster relief. State and local governments regularly fund and contract with nonprofits as extensions of their public service delivery system to support vulnerable populations. Because of this role, nonprofits can be just as important to the health and well-being of residents as traditional critical infrastructure, and **civil society would be deserving beneficiaries** of cyber volunteering programs like cyber reserve teams.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share more information about regional cyber volunteering<sup>3</sup> and cyber capacity-building programs with the Committee.

### **The UC Berkeley CLTC | Public Interest Cybersecurity Program**

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<sup>3</sup> More information on the location of cyber volunteering programs can be found at [cybervolunteers.us](https://cybervolunteers.us), on cyber clinics at [cybersecurityclinics.org](https://cybersecurityclinics.org), and a broad overview of the state of cyber volunteering and recommendations for areas of improvement in our report "The Roadmap to Community Cyber Defense" at [cltc.berkeley.edu](https://cltc.berkeley.edu).