

HON. STACY A. MAYER
CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE
BALTIMORE COUNTY
CHAIR

HON. RICHARD SANDY
CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE
FREDERICK COUNTY
VICE-CHAIR



KELLEY O'CONNOR
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MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
FROM: Legislative Committee
Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq.
410-260-1523
RE: Senate Bill 697
Election Law - Actions to Influence an Election - Social Media
Platform Algorithms and Bots Purchased by Foreign Nationals
DATE: February 18, 2026
(2/25)

INFORMATIONAL COMMENT PAPER

The Judiciary respects the separation of powers doctrine and acknowledges the policy-making authority of the legislative branch. As such, the Judiciary has no position on the policy aims of this legislation.

Although the Judiciary takes no position on this legislation, it wishes to point out that the bill uses the term “seal” rather than “shield.” Sealing a record is a judicial action that requires a judge’s formal order. It typically involves a higher level of privacy protection, restricting access to the entire case record. Sealed cases are hidden from general clerk access and require supervisor or judicial intervention to view or update. Sealing is mostly governed by court rules and is used in sensitive situations requiring confidentiality beyond shielding.

Shielding a record is an administrative action performed by clerks without a judge’s direct involvement. Clerks have the authority to shield records to protect certain information from public disclosure. Shielded cases remain active and accessible internally to court staff but are protected from public view. Shielding is primarily

statutory and often applies to specific types of information or cases, such as dismissed or denied peace or protective orders, or victim/witness identifying information.

cc. Hon. Brian Feldman
Judicial Council
Legislative Committee
Kelley O'Connor