

SB632.pdf

Uploaded by: Christopher West

Position: FAV

CHRIS WEST
Legislative District 42
Baltimore and Carroll Counties

Judicial Proceedings Committee



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 322
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3648
800-492-7122 Ext. 3648
Chris.West@senate.maryland.gov

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 26, 2026

The Maryland State Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 632 – State Government – State Elected Officials – Protection of Personal Information

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

I am here to introduce Senate Bill 632. This is one of my most critical bills this year. In 2023, the State Judiciary introduced legislation designed to protect critical personal information about judges from being easily accessible by people who might have evil intent. The 2023 bill was not enacted into law.

That summer Judge Andrew F. Wilkinson, a judge on the Circuit Court for Washington County, was assassinated in the driveway of his home as he arrived home for dinner following a day in court. His assassin was a litigant who had received an unfavorable ruling in Judge Wilkinson's courtroom. I can recall calling my Judicial Proceedings Committee Chairman the night of the assassination and stressing the importance of enacting a bill to protect our state judges at the earliest opportunity in the 2024 General Assembly Session.

In 2024, the General Assembly indeed passed Senate Bill 575, known as the Judge Andrew F. Wilkinson Judicial Security Act. This bill recognized that the public availability, both online and in publicly available documents, of home addresses, personal contact information, and other identifying information about judges, their spouses and their children create serious safety risks. SB 575 established a process by which judges and the members of their household could request that personal information not be published or be removed from existing websites and online databases and created mechanisms to enforce those protections.

Importantly, just last week, in the Judicial Proceedings Committee, in response to a question that I posed, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Maryland stated that the Wilkinson Act has been implemented successfully and is functioning effectively. The program is fully operational and actively utilized. Notably, the provision allowing for redaction of paper records in

CHRIS WEST
Legislative District 42
Baltimore and Carroll Counties

Judicial Proceedings Committee



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 322
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3648
800-492-7122 Ext. 3648
Chris.West@senate.maryland.gov

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

exceptional circumstances has not needed to be invoked, demonstrating that removing personal information from online platforms has proven sufficient to address safety concerns. The accompanying task force established under the Act is also operating as intended. I understand that the Judiciary contracts out the duty to remove personal information from the internet and that the cost per request is about \$375. This is a very small price to pay to protect our judges.

Last summer, something like Judge Wilkinson's assassination occurred in Minnesota. A man filled with hatred was able to access personal information about members of the Minnesota General Assembly. He armed himself and then began a round of visits to the homes of multiple legislators. He went to the home of the leader of the House Democratic caucus and killed both the caucus leader and her husband. Then he went to the home of another state senator and shot the senator and his wife, seriously injuring them. He also visited a third home and rang the doorbell, but the state senator and his wife fortuitously had left their home very early that morning and therefore did not answer the door, but the doorbell camera recorded the sinister image of the assassin standing at their front door.

Due in part to the omnipresence of social media and their use to purvey messages of fury and hate, these sorts of targeted assassinations are occurring more and more frequently. Deranged people harboring grievances are easily able to learn where public officials live and then target them for assassination.

It is only a matter of time before a Maryland legislator suffers the same fate as the legislators in Minnesota. We are not immune from the scourge of vituperative hatred spewed out in social media daily.

Senate Bill 632 is intended to provide the same protections to Maryland state officials as Senate Bill 575 provided to Maryland judges.

SB 632 follows the exact same framework as was used in SB 575. Indeed, I used SB 575 as a template as I crafted SB 632. The only change in this bill is the provision that charges the Department of Legislative Service with the duty of implementing the bill's provisions instead of the Administrative Office of the Courts, as provided for in SB 575. Otherwise, the two bills are nearly identical.

The bill establishes an Office of State Elected Officials Information Privacy within the Department of Legislative service. The Office would manage requests from individuals eligible for protection- including current and former statewide elected officials, members of the General

CHRIS WEST
Legislative District 42
Baltimore and Carroll Counties

Judicial Proceedings Committee



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 322
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3648
800-492-7122 Ext. 3648
Chris.West@senate.maryland.gov

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Assembly, and their household members- to prevent the publication of, or require the removal of, certain personal identifying information from government records and online platforms.

It would set forth clear procedures and timelines for compliance and provide appropriate remedies for violations. Similar to SB 575, this bill does not limit transparency in government decision-making or restrict access to official public records related to governmental actions. Rather it is narrowly tailored to protect personal residential and contact information that serves no public oversight function but may expose officials and their families to risk.

SB 632 recognizes that public service should not require elected officials or their families to sacrifice their personal safety. By aligning protections for elected officials with those already provided to judges, this bill promotes fairness, consistency, and security across branches of government.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of SB 632 and would be happy to answer any questions.

Brennan Center Testimony at MD Education, Energy,

Uploaded by: Celina Avalos Jaramillo

Position: FWA

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 Law¹ 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.² Senator John Hoffman and his wife were critically injured in the attack, with dozens more officeholders on the assailant’s list.³ In September, Charlie Kirk was assassinated at Utah Valley University during a debate.⁴ And

¹ 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.

² 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>.

³ 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>.

⁴ “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.⁵

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 home⁶ by an individual involved in a divorce proceeding.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.”⁹

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.¹⁰ 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

⁵ 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/>

⁶ 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>.

⁷ 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/>.

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

⁹ “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>.

¹⁰ 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?””¹¹

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.¹² 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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 agencies¹³ pursuant to an investigative¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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

¹³ 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>.

¹⁴ 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/>.

¹⁵ Gowri Ramachandran et al., *Intimidation of State and Local Officeholders*.

SB 632 - State Ethics Commission - Info Testimony.

Uploaded by: Kate Thompson

Position: INFO



COMMISSION MEMBERS:

CRAIG D. ROSWELL, *Chair*
KAREN D. MORGAN
MARIELA OLIVARES
JAMES N. ROBEY, JR.
GENEAU M. THAMES

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION
45 CALVERT STREET, 3rd FLOOR
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401
410-260-7770 / 1-877-669-6085
<https://ethics.maryland.gov>

JENNIFER K. ALLGAIR
Executive Director
WILLIAM J. COLQUHOUN
General Counsel
KATHERINE P. THOMPSON
Staff Counsel
ANA L. HENRY
Assistant General Counsel
PANSY S. WATSON
Assistant Counsel

February 26, 2026

Senate Bill 632 – State Government – State Elected Officials – Protection of Personal Information

Testimony Before the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

This proposed legislation will have both a fiscal and operational impact on the State Ethics Commission. The anticipated fiscal impact would be approximately \$115,000 for necessary changes to IT programming for the Commission's electronic financial disclosure system, financial disclosure auditing program updates, IT programming for the necessary redaction of financial disclosure statement information through the office's public viewing terminal, three electronic training modules, and the electronic lobbying registration and reporting system. All updates to the various electronic systems from this legislation and necessary integration between IT systems will be completed by three separate outside vendors.

The State Ethics Commission will have to coordinate with the Office of State Elected Officials Information Privacy in the Department of Legislative Services to receive notification of State Elected Officials Address Confidentiality Program participants who are protected individuals under this legislation and required to file a financial disclosure statement or other reports with the State Ethics Commission that are required to be published pursuant to the provisions of the Public Ethics Law. The financial disclosure provisions of Subtitle 6 of the Public Ethics Law require financial disclosure filers to disclose information related to ownership interests or lease interests in real property, employment of the filer and the filer's spouse, and employment information of a dependent child if the dependent child's employer does business with the filer's governmental unit. The State Ethics Commission will have to take operational steps to identify disclosure information required under Subtitle 6 of the Public Ethics Law that is also protected from publishing under this legislation.

Pursuant to §5-606 of the Public Ethics Law, the State Ethics Commission is required to publish financial disclosure statements for Elected State officials, candidates to be State officials, and Secretaries of principal departments through an electronic system available on its website with access for registered public users. Information related to a primary or secondary residence of a filer must already be redacted from public view in this access system and from other public inspection pursuant to §5-606 of the Public Ethics Law. The State Ethics Commission will have to make significant programming changes to its electronic financial disclosure system for additional

required redaction of information for specific protected individuals outlined in this legislation. Additionally, programming changes to provide filers who are protected individuals with the opportunity to consent to public disclosure of protected information will also be necessary to comply with this proposed legislation. Changes to electronic training modules will also be necessary to reflect changes from this proposed legislation.

It is also possible that a protected individual under this legislation, specifically a former elected State official, may be a registered lobbyist with the State Ethics Commission and required to report information related to lobbying contact information and lobbying activity that is information protected under this legislation. Lobbyist registrations and reports filed with the State Ethics Commission are public records and available through the Commission's electronic lobbying system on its website. Additional programming changes to the electronic lobbying system will be necessary to provide registered lobbyists with the opportunity to consent to public disclosure of protected information. Necessary lobbying system programming changes must also incorporate options for additional public viewing redactions of protected information on previously filed lobbying registrations and reports. Changes to the electronic lobbying training module will also be necessary to reflect any changes from this proposed legislation.

The State Ethics Commission will also amend existing regulations to reflect the changes in the proposed legislation. Local governments may have to change the administrative provisions related to confidentiality, financial disclosure, and lobbying provisions in local ethics laws to reflect the proposed legislation.