

**SB.857: Maryland Employee Civic Activity and Lawful Expression Protection Act**  
Favorable Testimony  
Senate Finance Committee  
March 11, 2026

Honorable Chairwoman Beidle, Vice Chairman Hayes and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

As a postdoctoral researcher at the Harvard Kennedy School's Civic Power Lab,<sup>1</sup> I study how people make decisions about participating in politics. I study what spurs them toward participation and what acts as a barrier against it. In my work the barriers are clear, and fear of retaliatory job loss is one of them.

If Maryland is a state that values equal opportunity in political participation, we must pass HB.1356. No one should be afraid that exercising their rights and duties as a citizen of a democratic system may mean they cannot pay their bills next month.

In my doctoral work,<sup>2</sup> I interviewed dozens of activists working on reproductive rights. Many of them reported that those least likely to speak out were those most afraid to lose their jobs. One activist reported that he canvassed a teacher at her home and could only convince her to sign onto a petition she deeply supported if she knew no one else would see her name on the list. The teacher was concerned that if someone told her school to fire her for signing the petition, her school would let her go. Others reported that some of their friends were so afraid of professional repercussions for their political opinions that they did not register with their preferred party because they knew party registration is public record.

Without additional workplace protections, full democratic participation will remain out of reach at a time when we need as many people as possible to join the political process<sup>3</sup>. Authoritarians use political pressure to threaten the livelihoods of those who oppose them.<sup>4</sup> In order to protect our democracy from further erosion, we must eliminate the biggest barriers to regular people being an active part of the political process.

I urge the committee to report SB.857 favorably.

Thank you,

Dorothy Manevich, Ph.D  
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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this testimony are my own. I do not speak on behalf of the Harvard Kennedy School or Harvard University.

<sup>2</sup> Manevich (2025). Postcards or Porches, Close Friends or County Fairs: A New Theory of Political Participation Under Social Risk.

<https://dash.harvard.edu/entities/publication/139c8a05-1b84-4585-b96b-b3149b906866>

<sup>3</sup> Robson (2019). BBC. "The 3.5% rule: How a small minority can change the world."

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190513-it-only-takes-35-of-people-to-change-the-world>

<sup>4</sup> Protect Democracy (2022). The Authoritarian Playbook.

<https://protectdemocracy.org/work/the-authoritarian-playbook/#quashing-dissent>