



Maryland | Delaware | DC Press Association

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To: Government, Labor & Elections & Appropriations Committee

From: Rebecca Snyder, Executive Director, MDDC Press Association

Date: February 2, 2026

Re: **HB101 - OPPOSE**

The Maryland–Delaware–District of Columbia Press Association (MDDC) represents a broad cross-section of local news organizations serving Marylanders every day. Our members include large metropolitan newspapers, regional and community papers, nonprofit and for-profit outlets, and digital-first publications. Together, they reflect the local news ecosystem relied upon by residents, businesses, and public institutions across the state.

Local news organizations provide verified, independent information about the issues that directly affect people’s lives—local government decisions, courts, public safety, education, development, and elections. This reporting helps residents understand what their government is doing, how decisions are made, and how public resources are used.

The Press Association stands in strong opposition to HB101.

HB 101 would give the state editorial control over general election debates and condition state funding for public media on compliance with those requirements. This approach raises serious concerns about editorial independence and the appropriate role of government in news coverage.

As drafted, the bill is also exceptionally broad. Its definition of “public broadcaster” extends well beyond Maryland Public Television to include any broadcaster that receives state funds. In practice, this could encompass many privately owned or publicly traded broadcast stations that receive state dollars through routine advertising purchases. As a result, the bill’s reach is far wider than may be intended.

General election debates are an important part of public education. News organizations play a central role in informing voters by deciding how to cover elections, what formats best serve their audiences, and how to apply professional judgment to candidate inclusion. Those decisions are editorial in nature. Government direction of editorial policies—even when tied to funding—undermines the independence



We believe a strong news media is central to a strong and open society.

that allows journalism to serve the public interest rather than government priorities.

Editorial independence is not an abstract concept. It is what allows the press to scrutinize government actions, question those in power, and provide the public with information that may be uncomfortable but necessary. When government sets or enforces editorial rules, it creates the risk of censorship, favoritism, and retaliation, and it introduces a chilling effect that can narrow coverage and discourage robust reporting.

Maryland Public Television already operates under clearly defined editorial standards. Its published editorial policies (see page 26 in this document:

https://dc79r36mj3c9w.cloudfront.net/prod/filer_public/mpt-bento-live-

[pbs/about/79cbeb72fa_editorial_policies.pdf](https://dc79r36mj3c9w.cloudfront.net/prod/filer_public/mpt-bento-live-pbs/about/79cbeb72fa_editorial_policies.pdf)) detail the criteria used for debate participation, including ballot access, active campaigning, and demonstrated public support, such as performance in established, reliable, nonpartisan polling (generally 10% in the general election). These standards are developed over a period of years and reflect long-standing professional norms, not government mandate.

The Press Association urges an unfavorable report.