



March 5, 2026

Legislative Position: Unfavorable
House Bill 1356
Labor and Employment - Civic and Related Activities - Protection
House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Dear Chair Wells and members of the committee:

Founded in 1969, the Howard Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to helping businesses—from sole proprietors to large international firms—grow and succeed. With the power of 700 members that encompass more than 170,000 employees, the Howard County Chamber is an effective partner with elected officials and advocates for the interests of the county's business community.

On behalf of the Howard County Chamber of Commerce, we respectfully oppose HB 1356. While we appreciate the intent to safeguard civic participation, this legislation would significantly limit an employer's ability to enforce reasonable codes of conduct and to manage how employees represent their company, both inside and outside the workplace.

HB 1356 broadly restricts an employer's ability to take action based on "civic activity," "political activity," or other off-duty expression. As drafted, the bill would make it difficult for employers to address conduct that, although occurring outside work hours, directly harms a company's reputation, customer relationships, or workplace culture. In today's environment, where employees are often publicly associated with their employers through social media and community engagement, businesses must retain the authority to respond when off-duty behavior materially conflicts with company values or operations.

For small and mid-sized businesses, reputation is everything. Unlike their larger counterparts, they lack the resources to absorb reputational damage or defend against costly litigation arising from ambiguous standards. This bill would create legal uncertainty and expose employers to increased risk simply for enforcing long-standing professional standards.

Maryland employers support civic engagement, but HB 1356 shifts the balance too far by undermining basic management rights necessary to protect businesses, employees, and customers. For these reasons, we respectfully urge an unfavorable report.

Sincerely,

Kristi Simon
President & CEO
Howard County Chamber of Commerce