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Children, Youth, and Families

Senate Chair, Legislative Ethics



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony for Senate Bill 426
Public Information Act – Divorce Records
Before the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
April 7, 2026

Good afternoon Chair Wells and members of the committee.

Right now, anyone can walk into a courthouse and access someone else's divorce records. Financial disclosures and sensitive information have been disclosed. A stalker can learn their victim's phone number, email address, home address, and other identifying information. The only exception is that social security numbers must be redacted, but with the sheer number of documents filed for every case, plenty of SSNs slip through the cracks and end up in the public record.

This lack of privacy protections poses a significant financial, emotional, and personal risk to the public. Divorces create uniquely comprehensive records of at least two people's lives: their finances, their routines, their relationships with their families and friends. The public expectation of transparency should not extend to all the vulnerable details available under the current law.

When Delegate Simpson approached me to cross-file this legislation, she told a shocking story of a constituent who fell victim to this legal vulnerability. With one Public Information Act request granted, her privacy was gone. An upset individual received documents of this constituent's divorce – with nothing redacted. This individual then uploaded sensitive information, including social security numbers of the family, the phone number of the constituent, and several other identifiers that led to this constituent being subjected to harassment and death threats by her ex-partner and members of the public.

As a remedy, Senate Bill 426 ("SB 426") does three things:

- The bill requires strict confidentiality of all divorce records. Divorce applications, financial records related to a divorce application, divorce settlement records, and custody orders will be kept private.¹

¹ See proposed § 4-305.1(b).

- It excludes final divorce decrees from that privacy.²
- It restricts access to sensitive information to the parties to the divorce, the lawyers representing the parties to the divorce, and anyone authorized by a court order.³

These common-sense practices will protect the privacy and safety of divorcees and their children during a legally and emotionally vulnerable time. It will help prevent identity theft and shield sensitive business and personal financial details. It will protect the locations of victims of domestic violence.

The Senate and the House both unanimously passed identical versions of this bill thanks in part to your leadership on House Bill 403. I ask for a favorable report on SB 426 to finish strong on this important legislation.

² See proposed § 4-305.1(a).

³ See proposed § 4-305.1(c).