

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

March 31, 2026

The Maryland State House Environment and Transportation Committee
The Honorable Melissa Wells
145 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

I am here to introduce Senate Bill 632. This is perhaps my most important bill 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SB 575 established a process by which judges and the members of their household could request that personal information not be published or be removed from existing websites and online databases and created mechanisms to enforce those protections.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, several weeks ago, 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

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

in 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 her family 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.

There were two amendments added to the bill. The first amendment added bill sponsors. The second amendment adds that information that is required to be published under Title 5 of the General Provisions Article is not included as personal information; and allocates funds to members of the General Assembly to aid in the removal and identification of any personal information published.

As amended, the bill passed unanimously in the Senate 43-0.

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