

Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

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TO: The Honorable Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Nicholas T.R. Blendy, Esq., Assistant Sheriff, Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

RE: Senate Bill 544 – Courtroom Security – Minimum Adequate Security Standard

DATE: February 18, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Sheriff's Office (BCSO) **supports with amendment** Senate Bill (SB) 544.

If enacted, SB 544 is an attempt to codify clear, uniform, and minimum adequate security standards for the operations of security personnel in courtrooms and courthouses around the State. In Baltimore City, where its Sheriff is the Chief of Court House Security as designated by State law,¹ the resources devoted to this service are deeply incongruous to those that are required as the number of judges has more than doubled since the responsibility was first given to the Sheriff in 1973. For example, in 1973, there were fifteen (15) judges of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City,² whereas there are thirty-five (35) in 2026.³ In 1973, there were thirty-five (35) funded court security officer (CSO) position in the Sheriff's budget; today, there are thirty-eight (38), even as the number of judges has more than doubled.

SB 544 fundamentally attempts to codify two important concepts. First, it articulates minimum qualifications for training and certification for a CSO—that of a Special Police Officer (SPO). The BCSO supports adopting this standard, which was recommended in the final report of the Task Force to Ensure the Safety of Judicial Facilities in Maryland (Task Force).⁴ The BCSO has implemented these

¹ See Md. Code of Pub. Local Laws, Art. 4, §§ 22-6 thru 22-11, et seq.

² The Supreme Bench of Baltimore City was reorganized as the Circuit Court of Baltimore City in 1983 after a 1980 amendment to the Maryland Constitution took effect.

³ See Md. Courts & Jud. Proc. §1-503(b).

⁴ See Task Force to Ensure the Safety of Judicial Facilities Report & Recommendations (December 2024), available at: <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5300/sc5339/000113/027000/027087/20250181e.pdf>.

standards already and all of its CSOs are either SPO certified through a partnership training course that it has established with Coppin State University, or are slated to attend a future class.

The second part of SB 544 attempts to set minimum adequate personnel staffing standards standard for courtrooms and courthouses at two calendar dates in the future: July 1, 2027 and July 1, 2029. And the minimum staffing standards are consistent with those very thoughtfully contemplated and recommended by the Task Force.⁵ Where this part of SB 544 comes up short, however, is in the language on Page 1, Lines 19-21 “...ANY ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING COURTHOUSE SECURITY SHALL USE BEST EFFORTS TO HAVE PRESENT...”, and the same language repeated again on Page 2, Lines 8-10.

While the BCSO strongly supports the minimum qualifications for CSOs and the portions of the bill that articulate the minimum personnel standards per courtroom and court facility, the language identified above is, in its opinion, extremely problematic. In short, it is either not an adequate standard mandate at all, or worse, it is an unfunded one. The BCSO is no stranger to advocating for additional funding at the state and local level for the needs of protecting the Baltimore City Circuit Court facilities. Sheriff Cogen and his staff have testified during the past two (2) local budget cycles about the shortfall in the Court Security Service line item which underfunds the BCSO roughly \$6.5 million.⁶ This is the deficit that would need to be closed by July 1, 2029 to achieve the standards set forth in SB 544.

As such, the **BCSO respectfully requests that SB 544 not be passed in its current form** until the committee and stakeholders identify a dedicated funding mechanism through any combination of funding sources that the General Assembly sees fit. Otherwise, this legislation is guaranteed to put the BCSO—just as it will for other Sheriff’s offices—in between false hope and expectations from its local bench of judges and the general public and the strain of its local government—the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore—to identify resources without any mandate upon them to find the money and no assistance from a new source. To expect the local government to find this money within its existing means in the current budgetary constraints borders somewhere between naïve and fanciful, in the opinion of the BCSO.

In closing, the issue of security in judicial facilities is one that should be of paramount importance to everyone committed to a democratic form of government. Throughout the country and in every corner of the State of Maryland, the hardworking personnel that keep the safety of judges, judicial employees, individuals awaiting their trials, jurors, and other members of the general public are doing their work without a minimum and uniform standard to adequately ensure our safety in and around these facilities, and without sufficient resources. SB 544 provides a vehicle to take the next step in providing the security that all Marylanders deserve when they are in these buildings, but it cannot meaningfully accomplish this until the funding mechanism is addressed.

For the foregoing reasons, the BCSO respectfully requests a **favorable with amendment** report on SB 544.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *See* Letter from Baltimore City Assistant Sheriff Nicholas Blendy to Baltimore City Bureau of Budget Management & Research Director Laura Larsen dated June 4, 2025).