



Continuing the Missions of the Stephanie Roper Committee and Foundation, Inc.

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February 13, 2026

Re: Favorable with amendments to SB 531

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

On behalf of the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center (MCVRC), I respectfully urge a **favorable with amendments report** on Senate Bill 531.

MCVRC supports the intent of this legislation to ensure that victims of sexually assaultive behavior are not pressured—formally or informally—into limiting investigations, waiving rights, or relieving law enforcement of obligations through written or verbal acknowledgements.

This bill represents an important step toward reinforcing victim autonomy and transparency in interactions with law enforcement. By prohibiting requests that purport to limit investigations, prosecutions, or civil remedies, SB 531 helps protect victims from feeling coerced or misled during an already traumatic and vulnerable time

However, MCVRC respectfully suggests that the bill could be strengthened by clarifying that law enforcement may not ask or encourage a victim to “not prosecute” or to decline prosecution of the alleged offender.

While SB 531 appropriately prohibits requests that would “prevent or limit a prosecution,” in practice, victims may experience pressure through less formal language or conversational requests—such as being asked whether they “want to press charges,” being encouraged to reconsider pursuing the case, or being asked to verbally indicate that they do not want prosecution to move forward.

These interactions can carry significant weight for victims and may influence reporting, cooperation, and long-term engagement with the justice process.

Victims of sexually assaultive behavior often face complex emotional, safety, and psychological pressures. When a request not to prosecute comes from law enforcement—an authority figure in whom victims are expected to place trust—it may be perceived as a recommendation or expectation rather than a neutral inquiry. Even when unintentional, this dynamic can undermine the bill’s core goal of preventing coercion or perceived coercion.

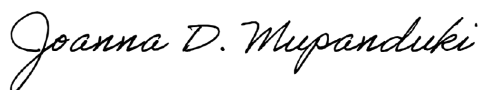
To ensure consistency with the bill’s purpose, MCVRC recommends that the Committee clarify that law enforcement may not request, encourage, or solicit a victim’s agreement not to pursue prosecution of the alleged offense. Such clarification would reinforce that decisions regarding charging and prosecution rest with the State, and that victims should not feel responsible for initiating, declining, or halting criminal proceedings at the request of law enforcement.

Importantly, this recommendation does not limit a victim’s right to express their wishes or concerns about an investigation or prosecution. Rather, it ensures that those wishes are truly voluntary and not prompted or shaped by requests from authorities that may be experienced as pressure.

SB 531 takes meaningful steps toward safeguarding victim rights and strengthening trust in the justice system. Clarifying this additional protection would further align the bill with its purpose of ensuring that victims are not asked—directly or indirectly—to relinquish their rights or limit the justice process.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this important legislation and for your continued commitment to protecting victims of crime across Maryland. MCVRC would be pleased to provide any additional information that may assist the Committee.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joanna D. Mupanduki".

Joanna D. Mupanduki, Esq.
Deputy Director
Maryland Crime Victims Resource Center, Inc.