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Date: February 16, 2026

Bill Number: SB 544

Position: Favorable

On behalf of the Maryland State's Attorneys' Association (MSAA) and prosecutors throughout Maryland, we write in support of Senate Bill 544, which establishes minimum statewide standards for courthouse and courtroom security.

Prosecutors regularly appear in proceedings involving incarcerated defendants, emotionally charged disputes, and family members of defendants and victims who are not satisfied with the criminal justice system. These settings present heightened safety risks for judges, court staff, victims, witnesses, defendants, and attorneys. Senate Bill 544 appropriately addresses these risks by ensuring consistent, adequate security in all courthouse facilities across the State.

The bill's requirement that court security officers meet the qualifications of special police officers promotes professionalism, accountability, and effective response to courtroom threats. Additionally, the phased-in staffing standards, requiring dedicated security officers in courtrooms, enhanced coverage for high-risk proceedings, and supplemental officers on each courthouse floor, reflect the practical realities faced daily in criminal, family, and juvenile courts.

Adequate courtroom security is essential to the fair and orderly administration of justice. Prosecutors must be able to perform their duties without fear of intimidation or violence, and victims and witnesses must feel safe participating in court proceedings. Senate Bill 544 advances these fundamental goals while providing reasonable implementation timelines.

For these reasons MSAA respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 544.