



Working to end sexual violence in Maryland

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Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 180
Lisae C. Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel
January 22, 2026

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence. We urge the Judicial Proceedings Committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 146.

Senate Bill 180 – Housing Discrimination Investigations – Sexual Harassment

Senate Bill 180 provides for an additional tool for housing discrimination investigations by permitting audio recording by investigators who are government entities or nonprofit organizations with specified experience or a person subject to the discrimination. We note that this bill is a partial response to this issue and one that does not protect individuals seeking housing on their own or current tenants being sexually harassed by landlords. As such, while we support this bill, MCASA urges the Committee to also seek a broader solution.

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination and all too common in the housing context. Tenants and prospective tenants have faced unwanted comments, touching, and assault, as well as requests for sexual favors as a condition of maintenance or in return for rent. In Baltimore City at Gilmore Homes, maintenance workers demanded sexual favors from women in order to get repair work done to their apartments. Those who refused to perform sexual favors were subjected to life-threatening living conditions. <https://www.wbaltv.com/article/victims-sought-in-sex-for-repairs-baltimore-public-housing-scheme/7096427>

The US Department of Justice provided many examples of these cases in their Sexual Harassment in Housing Initiative, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/sexual-harassment-housing-initiative-recent-cases#Donahue>. These include, for example:

Shambayati harassed female tenants and prospective tenants by making repeated and unwelcome sexual comments and advances, inappropriately touching their bodies without their permission, entering their homes without their permission, requesting sexual acts in exchange for rent or other housing-related benefits, and taking retaliatory

actions against female tenants who rejected his sexual advances or complained about the harassment.

Richard Donahue offered to reduce monthly rental payments in exchange for sex, made unwelcome sexual comments and advances, and evicted or threatened to evict female tenants who objected to or refused his sexual advances.

Bruno engaged in harassment that included demanding or pressuring female applicants to engage in sexual acts to obtain rental privileges, asking to take and taking pictures and videos of the bodies of his tenants and their female children, and establishing, maintaining and forcing his tenants and their minor female children to view “dungeons” or “sex rooms” in the rental properties.

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These types of discriminatory acts typically take place in private, with no witnesses other than those involved. SB180 would help obtain evidence in these cases when there is harassment of those seeking housing. It would not help in many of the other scenarios reported above, however, so the bill has some significant limits. This is one of several bills expected to be introduced this session to address audio recording and one party consent. MCASA supports SB180, and urges the Committee to also support some of the broader approaches proposed by other legislation.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault
urges the Judicial Proceedings Committee to
report favorably on Senate Bill 180**