



# MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION

**MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION, INC.**

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**VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION**

Maryland General Assembly  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, MD 21401

January 27, 2026

**Re: Uniform Public Expression Protection Act (S.B. 251)**

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Motion Picture Association, Inc. (“MPA”) and our member studios strongly support, and urge you to advance, Senate Bill 251, the Uniform Public Expression Protection Act (“UPEPA”), which establishes a robust set of mechanisms to protect citizens and corporations sued in Maryland for exercise of their First Amendment rights on issues of public concern.

The MPA is a not-for-profit trade association founded in 1922 to address issues of concern to the motion picture industry. Since that time, the MPA has advanced the business and art of storytelling, protected the creative and artistic freedoms of storytellers, and brought entertainment and inspiration to audiences worldwide. The MPA’s member companies are: Amazon Studios LLC, Netflix Studios, LLC, Paramount Pictures Corporation, Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc., Universal City Studios LLC, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, and Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. In addition, several of the MPA’s members have as corporate affiliates major news organizations (including ABC, NBC, and CBS News, and CNN) and dozens of owned-and-operated television stations with broadcast news operations.

The motion picture and television industry is directly responsible for nearly 10,000 jobs in Maryland, including about 2,760 production-related jobs and 7,220 jobs in businesses that distribute movies, television and video content to consumers, e.g. at movie theaters and television broadcasters. In total, our industry supports almost 26,000

jobs and more than \$800 million in wages in the state, including indirect and induced jobs and wages supported by the industry, such as caterers, lumber yards, and restaurants.<sup>1</sup>

The MPA’s members and their affiliates are in the business of engaging in free speech on issues of public concern, whether they tell stories through fictional films, television documentaries, or news broadcasts of national or local interest. Unfortunately, that speech sometimes results in defamation or other lawsuits by individuals and corporate entities unhappy with how they were portrayed. These lawsuits—even if ultimately unsuccessful—are often expensive and burdensome to defend, and have the especially pernicious effect of chilling constitutionally protected speech on controversial topics, for fear that it will result in litigation, however meritless.

To combat this problem, 39 states and the District of Columbia have enacted so-called anti-SLAPP (“Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation”) statutes, which provide a powerful tool for those who are unjustly sued for the exercise of their free speech rights on public issues. The MPA’s members, as well as their affiliated news organizations, are strong supporters, and frequent users, of such statutes, which help ensure that their First Amendment rights to entertain and inform the public are not chilled by meritless lawsuits. But to be clear: anti-SLAPP statutes benefit not only the companies we represent, but all who speak out on public issues, from citizens voicing their views on the issues of the day, to victim-rights advocates, to online reviewers who posts their opinions of local businesses. That’s why UPEPA has won support from across the political spectrum, including from groups ranging from the ACLU, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and Authors Guild to conservative and libertarian groups such as Institute for Free Speech, National Right to Life Committee, and Institute for Justice, among many others.<sup>2</sup>

MPA urges Maryland to join the strong majority of states that have enacted anti-SLAPP protections to safeguard the First Amendment rights of their citizens and those who do business there. We thus respectfully urge your support of S.B. 251.

Very truly yours,



Benjamin S. Sheffner

cc: Senator Sara Love  
Senator Shelly Hettleman

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.motionpictures.org/advocacy/driving-local-economies/#map>.

<sup>2</sup> See Institute for Free Speech, *An Open Letter in Support of the Uniform Law Commission’s Uniform Public Expression Protection Act* (June 23, 2022), [https://www.ifs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Coalition-Letter-for-ULC-Model-Act\\_6.23.22.pdf](https://www.ifs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Coalition-Letter-for-ULC-Model-Act_6.23.22.pdf).