

Testimony for the Record

Submitted to the Maryland Senate Judiciary Committee
For the Hearing Regarding Senate Bill 251 (Uniform Public Expression Protection Act)
1/27/2026

Submitted by Anne Marie Tamburro, Press Freedom Counsel
Society of Professional Journalists

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and Members of the Committee: Thank you for considering my written testimony regarding Senate Bill 251 and for your attention to proposed legislation supporting press freedom and freedom of expression.

My name is Anne Marie Tamburro, and I am the Press Freedom Counsel at the Society of Professional Journalists, the nation's most broad-based journalism organization, dedicated to encouraging the free practice of journalism and upholding high ethical standards since 1909. My work focuses on advocating for the rights of journalists to report freely and safely and to advance public knowledge in pursuit of transparency and accountability. I speak on behalf of our members in strong support of Senate Bill 251 as a crucial measure to protect freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Maryland.

Anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) laws like Senate Bill 251, modeled after the Uniform Law Commission's ("ULC") Uniform Public Expression Protection Act ("UPEPA"), provide journalists with protections and procedures to stop baseless attempts to censor their speech using the courts. When someone pursues litigation for the purpose of censoring expression they find unfavorable, anti-SLAPP laws like Senate Bill 251 offer recourse to journalist defendants by expediting the process to stop malicious and baseless lawsuits before they can incur a significant toll in terms of time, energy and cost.

Without anti-SLAPP laws, aggrieved subjects of reporting can pursue litigation like defamation claims against journalists and their publications as a way to stop expression they dislike in its tracks and impose administrative hurdles on continued reporting. Journalists are left to defend themselves against these meritless lawsuits on a standard court timeline, where litigation costs rise exponentially and reporting languishes in judicial purgatory for weeks to months on end, perhaps never seeing the light of day. By contrast, anti-SLAPP laws even the playing field for the press, giving them the opportunity to move for dismissal or stay proceedings from the outset of the lawsuit. This discourages the use of the legal system as a tool of censorship and equips journalists with a tool to quickly combat litigation that is not founded on legitimate claims and whose primary goal is to censor.

By codifying Senate Bill 251, Maryland would join the ranks of 39 other states across the country that have already implemented anti-SLAPP laws, 14 having adopted laws that mirror UPEPA. The press in our country is currently under attack from all angles, more so now than

any time in recent history, and anti-SLAPP laws like Senate Bill 251 are vital for journalists to defend themselves against those attacks as they are carried out in the courts. We respectfully urge the committee to stand with the press in Maryland and across the country and to advance SB 251.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at amtamburro@hq.spj.org if you would like to discuss our concerns on press freedom and support for Senate Bill 251. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Anne Marie Tamburro
Press Freedom Counsel, Society of Professional Journalists