



Senate Bill 544

Courtroom Security - Minimum Adequate Security Standard

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: February 18, 2026

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 544. This bill would require counties across the state to fund substantially more positions for security officers in the Circuit Courts. While counties support the intent, the bill mandates funding without any clear accounting or detailing, from the courts or Sheriffs, as to the exact cost of officer shortages or needed equipment by jurisdiction. Merely dropping a set of standards as a new county unfunded mandate is untenable. A collaborative state/county approach to these desired improvements is the only reasonable path to implement them.

Circuit Courts are fully funded by county governments but operated by the State, with only a finite number of expenses statutorily eligible for reimbursement from state funding. As written, the bill requires juvenile, family, and criminal law proceedings to have one officer each by the end of the year. Any proceeding with an incarcerated individual would need two officers and an extra officer is required for every four courtrooms per floor in the courthouse. The requirement further specifies that by 2029, all proceedings not included before that time must now have a security officer present.

While these are worthy standards to establish, the actual current security capacity of each Circuit Court has not been made clear to counties, only that it would be a significant increase from current practice. Therefore, anticipating and planning for these new costs in the county budget is not possible at this time, while they are in the midst of budgeting for the effected fiscal year in the bill. Furthermore, to put these standards into effect in January would attempt to mandate a county to provide a significant contribution that is not authorized in the current budget or having gone through the mandated appropriation process. For many jurisdictions, even two more deputies could dwarf their entire annual contingency budget.

It is not a practical solution to assume counties can absorb these new and unclear costs. Counties have very few avenues to raise revenue to support new mandates. County budgets are already deeply strained to cover the substantially increasing mandates in education, state cost shifts, and elsewhere. For this reason, MACo urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report for SB 544.