



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 3, 2026

The Honorable William C. Smith, Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland State Senate
Annapolis, Maryland

Re: SB 676 - Criminal Law - Threat of Mass Violence - Penalty
Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 676, legislation that holds perpetrators accountable and promotes public safety by altering the crime of making a threat of mass violence from a misdemeanor to a felony.

In Maryland, any person who knowingly threatens to commit or threaten to cause a crime of violence that would place five or more people at substantial risk of death or serious physical injury if the threat was carried out would be found guilty of a misdemeanor. On conviction, they are subjected to imprisonment not exceeding 10 years or a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or both.

On February 26, 2026, a 16-year-old girl from Gaithersburg made threats of mass violence against Wootton High School on social media. This threat came over two weeks after a shooting at the same school in which one student victim suffered from a gunshot wound.

Five cases in Maryland were observed, with three stemming from Montgomery County. All of the Montgomery County cases involved perpetrators who were male teenagers and all three were charged with threats of mass violence. Parkland Middle School (March 2025), Rockville Internal Medicine (October 2025), and Wootton High School were the places of interest. Most notable was the last case, in which Alex Ye, 19, was arrested in April 2024 and was found guilty of one count of threat of mass violence for writing 129 pages about a school shooting. His defense called the document simply a disturbing work of fiction, but Judge Jill Cummins determined Ye threatened real violence. Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy told reporters that "the judge said this was not a joke, this was not jest and it was not protected speech."

The other two cases were in Worcester County and Frederick County, consisting of two juveniles who were charged with conspiracy to commit first degree murder at Snow Hill Middle School in March 2019 and a 28 year old man who threatened a children's camp held at Emmitsburg Elementary School and assaulted two deputies in July 2025, respectively. In the latter case, the perpetrator, Benjamin Dewees, was charged with threat of mass violence, assault, and more.

It is clear to see that this is a pressing and ongoing issue in the State, yet the penalty does not match the crime given the severity of the crime. Reclassifying the threat of violence to a felony from a misdemeanor addresses the severity of the act and ensures that the progression of these threats are deterred or stopped completely before they turn into real-life, fatal incidents. This bill serves as one of many preventative measures against mass violence by intervening before such acts against public safety are committed. Marylanders deserve safety, and this legislation will ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and are convicted of a charge that fits their crime.

States that already consider this crime as a felony include Alabama, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Nevada, New York, Rhode Island, and Virginia. SB676 is narrow and straightforward and would allow Maryland to become one of the many states that already declare the threat of mass violence as a felony.

SB676 does not enforce other preventative methods like gun control laws or mental health resources, create a new offense or change other associated penalties, and shortcut due process.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 676.

With Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alonzo T. Washington', with a stylized, flowing script.

Alonzo T. Washington

Maryland State Senate

District 22

White Paper: SB676 - Criminal Law - Threat of Mass Violence - Penalty

Prepared for: Maryland General Assembly

Prepared by: Office of Senator Alonzo T. Washington

Date: March 3, 2026

Executive Summary

SB676 intends to alter the crime of making a threat of mass violence from a misdemeanor to a felony.

With a rise of mass violence nationwide and in Maryland, often carried through mass shootings, the penalties associated with this act, even the act of threatening mass violence, deserve fair repercussions so that public safety remains the top priority. This bill addresses post-incident accountability, and does not identify other methods to prevent mass violence or create a new offense.

Reclassifying this crime to a felony showcases the severity of the act and the appropriate consequences to match it. It also serves as another measure to deter future acts or threats of mass violence by enacting a heavier penalty that can potentially stop perpetrators before they actually follow through with their threats. Preventative initiatives can prove to be life-saving, and this bill will close the gap in Maryland law so that fairness and accountability is provided and Marylanders feel safer.

Background

From the Active Assailant Interdisciplinary Work Group:¹

In the past five years, the number of mass shootings in the United States has nearly doubled each year. In 2019, a total of 417 mass shootings took place across the country. The most common characteristics for perpetrators include:

- Male
- Feelings of hopelessness or harboring grievances
- Feelings of victimization and sympathizing with others who they perceive to be similarly mistreated
- Often die by suicide following the attack,
- Frequently plan/prepare for the attack

Types of Threats:

- Low Level (Transient) Threat - Low risk threat that does not express a lasting intent to harm someone. A threat is transient only if it can be quickly and easily resolved and no longer exists.
- Serious (Substantive) Threat - High risk threat that expressed a continuing intent to assault someone by using a weapon or a threat to kill/inflct severe injury to someone. This also includes a moderate risk threat where an individual/situation does not appear to pose a threat of serious harm to self/others at this time but exhibits behaviors that indicate a continuing intent/potential for future violence or serious harm to self/others, or other concerning behavior that requires

¹ [Basic Threat Assessment for Threat of Mass Violence](#)

intervention. Moderate risk threats are listed as substantive threats because they require further evaluation and can be triaged to a transient threat.

Current Law & Practice

In Maryland, any person who knowingly threatens to commit or threaten to cause a crime of violence that would place five or more people at substantial risk of death or serious physical injury if the threat was carried out would be found guilty of a misdemeanor. On conviction, they are subjected to imprisonment not exceeding 10 years or a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or both.

Additionally, a court shall order a person convicted to reimburse the appropriate unit of federal, State, or local government or other person for any expenses and losses incurred in responding to the unlawful threat unless the court states on the record the reasons why reimbursement would be inappropriate.

A person who violates this law may be persecuted, tried, and convicted in any county where the threat was received, the threat was made, or the consequences of the threat occurred.

Data & Evidence

From a press release by the Montgomery County Department of Police, published March 20, 2025:²

- A 13-year-old Montgomery County student has been charged after making threats to carry out a school shooting against Parkland Middle School.
- As a precaution, Parkland Middle School initiated a shelter-in-place, and nearby Brookhaven Elementary School did the same because of its close proximity.
- The juvenile has been charged with threats of mass violence and disruption of school activities. Because the suspect is a minor, the case will be handled by the Department of Juvenile Services.

From a press release by the Montgomery County Department of Police, published October 28, 2025:³

- A 17-year-old male from Silver Spring has been charged in connection with a bomb threat that was made over the phone against Rockville Internal Medicine (RIM) on Thursday, October 23, 2025.
- The threat led to an evacuation of the building and the deployment of resources from Montgomery County Department of Police, Rockville City Police Department and Montgomery County Fire and Rescue to determine the validity and ensure the safety of the community. The threat was ultimately determined to be not valid.
- The teen has been charged with threats of mass violence, telephone misuse, threats of arson, and providing false statements— concerning a destructive device or toxic material.

From an NBC Washington news article, published January 9, 2025:⁴

² [Montgomery County Student Charged After Making School Threats](#)

³ [Silver Spring Teen Charged Following Bomb Threat](#)

⁴ [Teen convicted of threatening violence at Montgomery County high school](#)

- Alex Ye, 19, of Rockville, was found guilty on one count of threat of mass violence after a two-day bench trial in December; he wrote 129 pages about a school shooting at Wootton High School, his former school.
- His defense called the document simply a disturbing work of fiction. Judge Jill Cummins determined Ye threatened real violence, Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy told reporters.

From a press release by the Worcester County Sheriff's Office:⁵

- Two juveniles have been charged with conspiracy to commit first degree murder and related offenses in connection with what has been deemed a credible threat to Snow Hill Middle School.
- As a result of the County Bureau of Investigation's efforts, a juvenile was detained at approximately 4:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 23, 2019. A second juvenile was detained on the morning of Monday, March 25, 2019 as a result of the continued investigation.
- Evidence recovered from both suspects' residences included materials referencing a prior national school shooting event as well as plans relating to a school shooting at Snow Hill Middle School. Evidence recovered also revealed that this plot had been several months in the making.

From a press release by Frederick County Sheriff's Office, published July 30, 2025:⁶

- On July 29, 2025, at approximately 10:11 a.m., deputies from the Frederick County Sheriff's Office (FCSO) responded to a report of a threat of mass violence at a children's camp held at Emmitsburg Elementary School.
- The suspect, Benjamin Dewees, 28, of Emmitsburg, MD, was charged with threat of mass violence, assault, disturbing the peace, and disorderly conduct.
- When deputies attempted to take Dewees into custody regarding the threats of mass violence, he assaulted two deputies. One deputy was transported to an area hospital, treated, and later released. The other deputy was uninjured.

Most recent - From a press release by the Montgomery County Department of Police, published February 26, 2026:⁷

- A 16-year-old Gaithersburg girl has been charged in connection with a social media threat that was made on Instagram against Wootton High School on Tuesday, February 24, 2026.
- A detective with the MCPD Threat Assessment and Behavioral Solutions Team, along with an officer, interviewed the suspect and her parents. The suspect admitted to making the threats and the investigation has determined that there does not appear to be an ongoing threat to the community.
- The teen has been charged with threats of mass violence. The case will be processed through the Department of Juvenile Services for disposition.

From a press release by the Montgomery County Department of Police, published February 9, 2026:⁸

⁵ [Press Release – Two Juveniles Charged in Connection with School Safety Threat](#)

⁶ [Man Arrested Following Threat of Mass Violence at Camp in Emmitsburg](#)

⁷ [Sixteen-Year-Old Charged with Making Social Media Threat](#)

⁸ [Summary of Events: Thomas S. Wootton High School Shooting](#)

- At approximately 2:15 p.m., Montgomery County Department of Police 1st District officers and Rockville City Police were dispatched to the school for a reported shooting.
- The student victim was found with one gunshot wound and transported to an area hospital in stable condition.
- The suspect, also a student, was quickly identified and arrested a short time later near the school. At this time, there is no further threat to public safety.

Other States

All 50 states have laws prohibiting a threat of violence or a terroristic threat. Some states where this is considered a felony:⁹

- Alabama - class C felony
- Alaska - class B felony
- Florida - second degree felony
- Hawaii - class C felony
- Illinois - class X felony
- Iowa - class D felony
- Missouri - class D felony
- Nevada - class B felony
- New York - class D felony
- Rhode Island
- Virginia - class 5 felony
- West Virginia - felony
- Wisconsin - class 1 felony

Identified Problems/Gaps

The repercussions for threatening to cause public injury or death is not being addressed appropriately at the judicial level. A misdemeanor does not hold the same weight as a felony and for a crime of this severity, in which serious harm or death of people is threatened, the penalty for perpetrators does reflect the crime. This bill addresses that gap.

Legislative Proposal

SB676 would classify the threat of mass violence as a felony instead of a misdemeanor. The bill is narrow and straightforward, and intends to make the punishment fit the crime. Preventable tragedies can start with early intervention and the legislation aims to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions against the community.

Five cases within Maryland were observed, with four occurring quite recently. It is clear to see that this is an ongoing issue of great concern in the State. Successful intervention, like reclassifying the crime as a felony, can shut down future possibilities of violence. Many other states have already declared the threat

⁹ [State Terrorism Threat Laws | Republican Policy Committee](#)

of mass violence as a felony, and SB676 intends for Maryland to follow in their footsteps and set fair and just repercussions.

What the Bill Does NOT Do

- Identify methods to prevent mass violence (community engagement, mental health resources, etc.)
- Enforce background check or gun control laws
- Create a new offense
- Shortcuts due process
- Change other penalties associated with imprisonment or fines

Impact

Marylanders are more protected when the law enforces fitting consequences for threats of mass violence. This legislation ensures that perpetrators are deemed as serious criminals and can help deter or stop the progression of the threat before it turns into actual, real-life, fatal incidents. Fiscal impact should be low or non-existent.

Conclusion

It is up to the legislature to create laws that are for public benefit and safety, and this bill will serve as one of many preventative measures against mass violence by intervening before such acts against the public are committed. SB676 is narrow and straightforward and would allow Maryland to become one of the many states that already declare the threat of mass violence as a felony.

Marylanders deserve safety, and this bill will ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and are convicted of a charge that fits their crime. Changing the offense to a felony will close the gap in current law and show to the public our commitment to safety and accountability.