



TESTIMONY FOR HB0501 – Criminal Law – Sexual Offense by a Person in a Position of Authority – FAVORABLE

Bill Sponsors: Delegates Bartlett, Behler, Embry, Fair, McComas, Pasteur, Phillips, Pruski, Schmidt, Simmons, and Woods

Committee: House Judiciary

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Jessica Gorski, Executive Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jessica Gorski, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB0501 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. We are a statewide coalition of grassroots organizations representing more than 30,000 Marylanders across every legislative district. Our mission is simple: to promote laws that protect people, strengthen public safety, and ensure dignity and justice for all Marylanders.

HB0501 is an essential, long-overdue update to Maryland’s criminal law, strengthening protections for minors and ensuring that individuals in positions of authority who abuse their power are held fully accountable.

This bill modernizes and expands the offense of sexual misconduct by a person in a position of authority. It increases penalties, creates felony-level consequences for the most serious violations, and closes gaps that have allowed some offenders to avoid meaningful accountability. HB0501 also prohibits individuals in positions of authority from engaging in sexual acts with minors under 13, and establishes enhanced penalties for offenders with prior convictions for sexual crimes.

These changes are urgently needed.

Children and adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to exploitation by adults who hold power over them—teachers, coaches, counselors, program leaders, and others entrusted with their safety. When those individuals abuse their authority, the harm is profound. Yet under current law, penalties for these offenses are often insufficient, and certain forms of misconduct are not clearly or consistently addressed.

HB0501 strengthens Maryland's response by:

- Establishing felony penalties for sexual offenses by a person in a position of authority involving a child under 13,
- Increasing penalties for repeat offenders,
- Clarifying prohibited conduct across school and youth-serving settings,
- Adding this offense as a predicate crime for sexual solicitation of a minor, and
- Updating sex offender registry classifications to reflect the seriousness of these crimes.

These reforms ensure that Maryland law reflects the gravity of abusing authority to harm a child and that offenders cannot evade accountability due to outdated statutory language.

HB0501 also reflects a trauma-informed approach to public safety. Survivors of child sexual abuse—particularly those harmed by trusted adults—face lifelong impacts. Strengthening the law affirms Maryland's commitment to protecting children, supporting survivors, and preventing future harm.

This legislation aligns directly with the mission of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. It advances public safety, supports justice for survivors, and ensures that Maryland's legal system does not tolerate the exploitation of minors by those entrusted with their care.

Protecting children from sexual abuse is not optional—it is a fundamental responsibility of the state. HB0501 provides the clarity, accountability, and strengthened penalties needed to meet that responsibility.

I appreciate your consideration. **We respectfully urge a FAVORABLE report on HB0501.**