

February 16, 2026

The Hon. J. Sandy Bartlett  
Chair, House Judiciary Committee  
101 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **HB 526 – Civil Actions – Settlement Agreements –  
Payment and Release**

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I write as a trial lawyer with thirty-plus years of experience representing innocent victims of unreasonable and unsafe conduct.

Most of the cases my firm handles end in a negotiated settlement. Over the years, it has taken an ever-increasing amount of time to bring a case from a negotiated settlement to closure.

At the extreme, in a case I resolved within the last five years, after reaching agreement as to the settlement amount in mediation, I waited about *nine (9) months* before defense counsel finally produced a *first draft* of a proposed written release.

After agreement on the value of a settlement, it should not take more than a year to close a case and secure payment for my clients.

Of course, that case was an outlier. However, I find myself and my clients waiting weeks and sometimes months to close cases that used to be closed in two weeks or less. I have no reasonable explanation for why it takes so much more time, on average, to bring these cases to closure.

House Bill 526 seeks to standardize, and thereby streamline, the process of bringing tort cases from negotiated settlement to closure. HB 526 provides default guardrails, so that after an oral or written agreement to resolve a tort claim for a specified amount of money:

- A proposed release must be produced within ten (10) days;
- All monies must be paid within fifteen (15) days after
  - The plaintiff produces an executed release agreement, or
  - Any required court approval has been obtained.

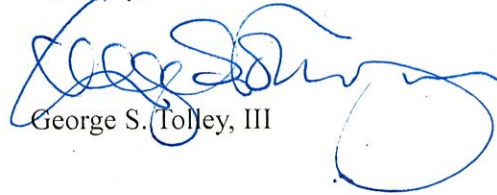
Every case is different, and some cases may require more time to close. HB 526 recognizes those realities, and explicitly provides that the parties in any case can negotiate different deadlines as needed.

If a defendant's insurer fails to meet the deadlines provided in HB 526 (or otherwise negotiated on a case-by-case basis), a reasonable rate of interest would apply. The parties also can negotiate the rate of interest.

Finally, HB 526 also provides for the protection of third-party interests, including liens and subrogation interests of health care providers, Medicaid and Medicare.

I respectfully ask for a **FAVORABLE** report on House Bill 526.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "George S. Tolley, III", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

George S. Tolley, III