

Good afternoon, Chair Bartlett and Vice Chair Davis. What a wonderful sound to my ears. Good afternoon to the impressive members of the Judiciary Committee. For the record, I am Delegate Cheryl Pasteur. It is my responsibility to bring HB 184 before you. HB184 prohibits a person from utilizing certain personal artificial intelligence or certain deepfake representations for certain purposes; providing that a person who is the victim of certain conduct may bring a civil action against a certain person; and generally relating to identity fraud and artificial intelligence and deepfake representations...simply said this bill is to combat the evolving threats posed by artificial intelligence and deepfake technology.

Artificial Intelligence is here; what it can do for us is powerful, but with that power comes the responsibility to address what it can do against us when misused for fraud, harassment, or deception. For all its good, AI can be detrimental when used for malicious intent that can cause emotional and psychological distress, harm to one's reputation, financial harm, economic loss, loss of possessions, physical injury, and livelihood. The number of reported deepfake incidents surged dramatically from twenty-two between 2017-2022 to 150 in 2024 and early 2025 already showed 179 incidents.

In 2024, at Pikesville High School on Baltimore County, the school's athletic director used deepfake technology to create a false audio recording of the school's principal, leading the public to believe the principal had used racist and antisemitic remarks. Although the equipment used was not advanced and easily acquired, it became the vehicle for a horrendous and dangerous period for the principal and his family. As legislators during an election year, we are all unwilling and unwitting targets, with the integrity of the electoral process threatened. Without this bill, we have little recourse to, at least, hold bad actors accountable.

New Jersey, Arizona, North Dakota, Hawaii, and Washington have already led the way; Maryland must protect its residents by doing the same. HB184 is our recourse against identity fraud, impersonation, or falsely depicting someone else with the intent to do harm by criminalizing those acts. The bill, also, creates a path to justice by establishing a victim's right to bring a civil action and authorizing the courts to order restitution for the costs of the identity theft and attorney fees. It modernizes Maryland law by expanding the definition of personal identifying information to include biometric data such as voice prints, iris images, and digital signatures, while providing carve outs for artistic expression, including drawings, cartoons, sculptures, and paintings.

This bill strengthens penalties by tying them to the value of the benefits obtained to the harm caused and by imposing stricter consequences for crimes involving multiple victims.

It also enhances enforcement by granting law enforcement broader authority to investigate and prosecute fraud across authorities.

Maryland must act now to address the dangers posed by these threats. I respectfully request a favorable report for HB 184. Thank you.