



**Letter of Support | NWDL Action
Maryland - HB 650 - 2026 Session
February 25, 2026**

To: House Committee on Judiciary
Maryland State Legislature

Fr: Emma Davidson Tribbs, Executive Director
National Women's Defense League

Date: February 25, 2026

Re: HB 650 - Maryland Uniform Public Expression Protection Act

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

On behalf of the **National Women's Defense League (NWDL)**, a national, nonpartisan organization dedicated to preventing sexual harassment and protecting survivors through research, advocacy, and survivor support, we write in strong support of **House Bill 650**, the Maryland Uniform Public Expression Protection Act.

H.B. 650 modernizes and strengthens Maryland's approach to strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) by replacing the current, more limited statute with a comprehensive and carefully structured framework. The bill establishes robust procedures for the expedited dismissal of civil actions that target individuals for exercising constitutionally protected expression, while maintaining clear safeguards to ensure legitimate claims may proceed.

Protecting Constitutional Expression and Public Participation

Individuals who speak out in governmental proceedings, report misconduct, advocate for policy reform, or participate in public debate on matters of community concern play a vital role in a healthy democracy. Yet civil litigation is increasingly used as a tool to intimidate and silence individuals for engaging in protected speech, petitioning activity, or association.

For survivors of abuse and workplace misconduct, and for the journalists, advocates, and community members who amplify their voices, retaliatory litigation can be particularly chilling. H.B. 650 ensures that individuals who engage in good-faith public expression on matters of public concern are not subjected to prolonged and costly litigation simply for exercising their constitutional rights.



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Clear Procedures and Timely Judicial Review

The Maryland Uniform Public Expression Protection Act establishes well-defined timelines and procedures for resolving claims that implicate protected expression. By requiring that special motions for expedited relief be heard and decided within specific timeframes, and by staying most proceedings during the pendency of the motion, the bill prevents the burdens of litigation from undermining the very rights the statute seeks to protect.

These procedural safeguards promote judicial efficiency and conserve court resources by identifying and resolving meritless claims at an early stage, while preserving the ability of courts to permit limited discovery where necessary.

Balanced and Carefully Tailored Standards

H.B. 650 strikes an appropriate balance between protecting constitutional rights and maintaining access to the courts. Dismissal is warranted only where the responding party fails to establish a prima facie case or where the moving party demonstrates entitlement to judgment as a matter of law. The bill's fee-shifting provisions deter abusive litigation while also safeguarding against frivolous or dilatory motions.

By mandating that the statute be broadly construed to protect constitutional rights and promoting uniformity with similar laws in other states, the Act aligns Maryland with a growing national consensus recognizing the need for effective anti-SLAPP protections.

Conclusion

House Bill 650 provides Maryland with a modern, uniform, and carefully balanced framework to protect public participation and constitutional expression from misuse of the judicial process. It strengthens safeguards for free speech while respecting the integrity of the courts and preserving legitimate claims.

NWDL respectfully urges the House Judiciary Committee to support H.B. 650 and advance this important legislation. Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Emma Davidson Tribbs
Co-Founder & Executive Director
National Women's Defense League Action Fund