



BILL NO: House Bill 501
TITLE: Criminal Law - Sexual Offense by a Person in a Position of Authority
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 10, 2026
POSITION: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that works to lead diverse community partners toward the common purpose of reducing the occurrence and impact of intimate partner violence. **MNADV urges a favorable report for HB 501.**

House Bill 501 addresses specific gaps in how the law handles abuse within power dynamics. It primarily focuses on increasing accountability for individuals who use their professional or supervisory status—such as teachers, coaches, or program leaders—to exploit minors or vulnerable individuals. The bill introduces several key changes to Maryland’s criminal code to strengthen protections and increase penalties:

- While the base penalty for a 4th-degree sexual offense is 1 year, HB 501 seeks to increase the penalty for people who have prior convictions for similar offenses.
- It adds "sexual offense by a person in a position of authority" to the list of "predicate crimes" for § 3-324 (Sexual Solicitation of a Minor). Essentially, this makes it easier for law enforcement to charge an authority figure for the attempt or the solicitation (grooming) stages, making it easier for prosecutors to target grooming behaviors.
- HB 501 specifically moves certain violations of § 3-308 into different Sex Offender Registry Tiers (Tier I or Tier III). This changes how long an offender must remain on the registry and how often they must report to authorities.
- The bill adds specific language prohibiting authority figures from committing these violations involving children under a certain age (specifically focusing on protecting those at least 6 years younger) to ensure no loopholes exist regarding the child's age vs. the authority figure's age.

HB 501 is particularly beneficial for survivors because it validates the specific harm caused by the betrayal of trust. By increasing the penalties for those in authority, the law recognizes that these crimes are not just individual acts of abuse but also systemic failures that require stronger deterrents.

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Furthermore, by clarifying the law around "grooming" and solicitation, the bill aims to intervene earlier in the cycle of abuse. For survivors, this shift toward accountability can be a crucial step in the healing process, as it ensures the legal system treats the exploitation of a power imbalance with the severity it deserves.

For all of the above reasons, MNADV urges a favorable report on HB 501.

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