



---

**Working to end sexual violence in Maryland**

P.O. Box 8782  
Silver Spring, MD 20907  
Phone: 301-565-2277  
www.mcasa.org

For more information contact:  
Lisae C. Jordan, Esquire  
443-995-5544

**Testimony Supporting House Bill 650**  
**Lisae C. Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel**  
February 25, 2026

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence. We urge the Judiciary Committee to report favorably on House Bill 650.

**House Bill 650 -- SLAPP Suits**

This bill clarifies and supports the exercise of constitutional rights to petition and exercise free speech by amending the law regarding SLAPP Suits – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. Sexual assault survivors across the country are increasingly facing lawsuits brought to discourage exercising their rights in college sexual misconduct proceedings and related Title IX actions. Some survivors encouraged to speak out about sexual violence by the #MeToo movement have also been met with lawsuits designed to silence them.

Legislation has been introduced this session to specifically address these lawsuits (HB465). While HB650 may be another tool to help discourage this type of litigation abuse in some cases, it would only apply when and if the disclosure of sexual assault is a “matter of public concern” (HB650, p.3, lines 25-26). The National Women’s Law Center has [analyzed SLAPP statutes](#) in various states and found that it is unclear if sexual assault is a matter of public concern in the majority of states (about 25), with about 8 states either probably or clearly covering statements regarding sexual assault, and four clearly not covering these disclosures. The state SLAPP statutes themselves vary broadly so a comparison between statutes is not on all fours. Should the Committee wish to create protections for sexual assault survivors in this bill as opposed to separate legislation, MCASA urges that the bill be amended to clearly include statements disclosing sexual assault.

Sexual assault survivors are repeatedly and urgently asked to disclose sexual assault. Current law is effectively a bait and switch for the brave survivors who do come forward – they disclose sexual assault and then the courts fail to discourage retaliatory litigation. HB650 is an effective response to this only if it is amended to clearly include all statements disclosing sexual assault either by defining “public matters” to include sexual assault disclosures (which is reasonable given the impact of sexual assault on public health) or otherwise making it clear that statements are covered in §5–1302 of HB650. Even then, it does not provide survivors with the same assurances that HB465 does because it does not require proof of actual malice or allow for a defense of good faith.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault urges the  
Judiciary Committee to  
report favorably on House Bill 650**