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Bill: HB 631– Criminal Law - Threats Against State or Local Official - Penalties

Committee: House Judiciary Committee

Position: Favorable

Date: February 6, 2026

The Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA) **supports** House Bill 631 – Criminal Law – Threats Against State or Local Official – Penalties, increasing the penalties for a violation of the prohibition against making certain threats against a State official, a local official, a deputy State's Attorney, an assistant State's Attorney, or an assistant Public Defender. MSBA represents more attorneys than any other organization across the state in all practice areas. Through its advocacy committees and various practice-specific sections, MSBA monitors and takes positions on legislation that protects the legal profession, preserves the integrity of the judicial system, and ensures access to justice for Marylanders.

This legislation is a necessary response to the steady rise in attacks and threats directed at the judiciary and officers of the court. Our members must be able to present cases and issue decisions without fear. Current data shows the need for the increased penalties in HB 631:

- **State Level:** In a report from the National Center for State Courts from late 2025, over 50% of the American public surveyed believe threats against judges and public officials had increased within the last twelve months. 78% of respondents supported federal legislation to prevent violence against state and local judges and court staff.ⁱ
- **Judicial Experiences:** A 2024 survey of nearly 400 judges from 48 states demonstrates the ongoing threat across the country. Most judges worried about their safety (82.7%) or felt threatened because of a decision they made in a case (74.1%). The majority reported that they had been threatened while being a judge (56.1%).ⁱⁱ
- **Federal Level:** The U.S. Marshall Service reported 564 threats against judges in 2025, compared to 509 in 2024 and 402 in 2022. In January of 2026, the Service had already reported 176 threats against federal judges.ⁱⁱⁱ

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HB 631 focuses on protecting our members and public officials whose daily duties involve public-facing, high-conflict matters, with no option to “opt-out” of cases or reject representation as their peers may choose in private practice. Our criminal and family law practitioners regularly report feeling unsafe due to their work and have no added security protections as they enter and exit courts, parking lots, general courthouse areas, and their offices. The majority of cases begin in state courts, with the Maryland Judiciary reporting 1,301,937 total filings in 2025 and 800,270 total case dispositions (as of November 4, 2025).^{iv} This case volume, combined with close contact in courts and easy access to digital tracking tools and online posting, has increased anti-court rhetoric, violent threats against state judges and attorneys, and spikes in swatting and doxing.

We must continue to strengthen protections and safety for judicial and court officers to protect the administration of justice and judicial integrity. The increased penalties in HB 613 will allow judges to make impartial decisions and attorneys to work without fear of violent threats and harmful physical recourse.

MSBA supports HB 631 and urges a favorable report.

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ⁱ NCSC 2025 State of the State Courts Poll, National Center for State Courts (December 10, 2025). <https://www.ncsc.org/resources-courts/state-state-courts-2025-public-opinion-poll-findings>

ⁱⁱ Perceptions and Experiences With Judicial Security Threats: A Survey of U.S. State Court Judges, Court Review (2024). <https://nationalcenterforstatecourts.app.box.com/v/AmJudgesCourtReviewArchive/file/1699377897310>

ⁱⁱⁱ Protective Investigations – Threat Statistics, U.S. Marshals Service (through January 30, 2026). <https://www.usmarshals.gov/what-we-do/judicial-security/protective-investigations-threat-statistics>

^{iv} Maryland Judiciary Data Dashboard: <https://www.mdcourts.gov/dashboard>