



BILL NUMBER: HB 465

TITLE: Civil Actions - Immunity - Disclosure of Allegations of Sexually Assaultive Behavior
(Stop Silencing Survivors Act)

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

HEARING DATE: 2/11/2026

POSITION: FAV

TurnAround, Inc. is the designated rape crisis center for Baltimore City and Baltimore County and a comprehensive domestic violence service provider. Core components of our work include crisis response, survivor-centered advocacy, legal referrals, trauma-informed therapy, and community education. TurnAround also serves as the Regional Navigator for Baltimore County and Howard County, providing specialized services to survivors of human trafficking. Each year, we support survivors as they navigate criminal investigations, prosecutions, and protective order proceedings in courts across Maryland.

House Bill 465 would provide critical protections for survivors by ensuring that individuals who in good faith disclose information about allegations of sexually assaultive behavior cannot be held civilly liable for doing so. The bill creates a clear presumption that a person sharing these allegations acted in good faith, which can only be overcome if it is shown by a preponderance of the evidence that the person acted with actual malice or knowingly or recklessly disclosed false information. HB 465 also requires courts to award reasonable attorney fees and costs to individuals who successfully defend against claims that they did not act in good faith, unless such an award would be clearly inappropriate.

For the survivors we serve, the ability to speak about harm they have experienced or witnessed is essential to both safety and healing. Survivors of sexual assault and related abuse often confide in friends, family members, advocates, employers, and community institutions when they are considering whether to seek medical care, report to law enforcement, or pursue civil or administrative remedies. When those around them fear being sued for defamation or other claims simply for listening to or sharing concerns in good faith, it can chill crucial conversations, isolate survivors, and prevent them from accessing life-saving support and justice.

Our advocates routinely work with survivors who have been threatened with legal action—or who fear such threats—when they disclose allegations of sexually assaultive behavior in workplaces, schools, housing settings, faith communities, or online spaces. In these contexts, the mere

possibility of a lawsuit can be used as a tool of intimidation by alleged perpetrators or their allies, pressuring survivors and their supporters into silence. By protecting good faith disclosures while still allowing legal accountability for statements made with actual malice or reckless disregard for the truth, HB 465 strikes a thoughtful balance between safeguarding survivors and preserving legitimate remedies for truly harmful, false accusations.

HB 465 is narrowly tailored to focus on disclosures of “sexually assaultive behavior,” as defined in Courts and Judicial Proceedings § 10–923 to include sexual crimes, sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, and comparable federal and out-of-state offenses. This targeted approach recognizes the particular dynamics of sexual violence, including the prevalence of underreporting, the power imbalances often involved, and the profound personal and community consequences when survivors are silenced. By clarifying that good faith disclosures are protected, Maryland will help ensure that survivors and those who support them can share concerns with employers, schools, organizations, and others who need this information to protect safety and respond appropriately.

We are particularly supportive of the provision requiring courts to award reasonable attorney fees and costs to individuals who successfully defend claims alleging they acted in bad faith in making these disclosures, absent a showing that such an award would be clearly inappropriate. Survivors and their allies often lack the financial resources to withstand prolonged, retaliatory litigation. Fee-shifting in these circumstances will discourage abusive lawsuits aimed at silencing people who raise good faith concerns about sexually assaultive behavior and will help level the playing field when such suits are filed.

By affirming immunity for good faith disclosures of allegations of sexually assaultive behavior, HB 465 will encourage more survivors and witnesses to come forward, share safety-critical information, and engage with systems of accountability without the constant fear of civil liability. This legislation sends a powerful message that Maryland understands the dynamics of sexual violence and is committed to protecting those who speak out in order to prevent further harm. For these reasons, TurnAround, Inc. respectfully urges the Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 465.

For further inquiries, please contact Amanda Rodriguez, Esq., Chief Executive Officer, at arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org.