



BILL NUMBER: HB 501

TITLE: Criminal Law - Sexual Offense by a Person in a Position of Authority

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

HEARING DATE: 2/10/2026

POSITION: FAV

TurnAround, Inc. is the designated rape crisis center for Baltimore City and Baltimore County and a comprehensive domestic violence service provider, offering 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, and is a member of MCASA, MNADV, and the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force. The Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MDHTTF) Legislative Subcommittee brings together service providers, law enforcement, and legal advocates to improve Maryland's response to trafficking and related forms of gender-based violence. Collectively, we work with survivors every day who rely on Maryland's protective order system as a core safety mechanism when they are fleeing abuse, including intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking-related exploitation.

On behalf of TurnAround, Inc. and the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force Legislative Subcommittee, we respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 501. HB 501 strengthens Maryland's criminal response to sexual offenses committed by individuals in positions of authority over children, including teachers, coaches, program staff, and others who supervise or interact with minors in schools and youth-serving programs. The bill increases penalties for sexual offenses by persons in positions of authority, creates enhanced felony penalties when the victim is under 13, and when the offender has prior qualifying sexual offense convictions, and integrates these crimes into the sexual solicitation statute and the sex offender registry framework.

Survivors of child sexual abuse and human trafficking routinely disclose that abuse by trusted adults in positions of authority is uniquely devastating, both because of the inherent power imbalance and because these adults are often gatekeepers to safety, opportunity, and basic needs. Children targeted by such offenders may be isolated from supportive adults, threatened with academic or program-related consequences, or told that no one will believe them, all of which heightens vulnerability and suppresses disclosure. When the law treats these violations as lower-level offenses or fails to distinguish repeat offenders and very young victims, it undermines

accountability and sends a dangerous message that abuse of authority will not be met with proportional consequences.

HB 501 directly addresses these gaps by: (1) clearly defining “person in a position of authority” to include school personnel and individuals working or volunteering in a broad range of programs serving minors; (2) prohibiting sexual acts, sexual contact, and vaginal intercourse with minors under the authority of these adults, with heightened penalties when the child is under 13; and (3) imposing more serious felony penalties when the perpetrator has prior convictions for specified sexual offenses or sexual abuse of a minor. By adding sexual offense by a person in a position of authority as a predicate to sexual solicitation of a minor and by classifying these offenses as Tier I or Tier III registrable sex offenses, the bill closes important loopholes in prevention and monitoring.

From our direct service experience, we know that children and youth abused by authority figures often encounter skepticism or minimization when they seek help, especially if the perpetrator is a respected teacher, coach, or community leader. Survivors have reported being pressured to remain silent to “protect the reputation” of programs or institutions or being transferred out of classes or activities while the offending adult remains in place. Stronger statutory penalties, coupled with clear recognition of these crimes in solicitation and registration provisions, are critical tools to deter predatory behavior, support survivor-centered investigations and prosecutions, and prevent repeat victimization across multiple institutions and jurisdictions.

HB 501 aligns with best practices in protecting children from sexual abuse and trafficking by recognizing the elevated risk posed by authority figures and by reinforcing that the responsibility for preventing abuse rests with adults, not with children. Enhancing penalties for those who target very young children and those with prior sexual offense histories reflects the heightened danger these offenders present and supports more robust safety planning for survivors and their families. These reforms also strengthen Maryland’s broader anti-trafficking and victim protection efforts by ensuring that adults who exploit their positions of trust to access and groom children face meaningful consequences.

For these reasons, TurnAround, Inc. and the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force Legislative Subcommittee respectfully urge the Judiciary Committee to issue a Favorable report on House Bill 501.

For further inquiries, please contact Amanda Rodriguez, Esq., Chief Executive Officer, TurnAround, Inc., and Chair, MDHTTF Legislative Committee, at arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org.