



BILL NUMBER: SB 512

TITLE: Criminal Law - Stalking - Penalties

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

HEARING DATE: 3/31/2026

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 the agency's 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. The organization is a member of the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA), the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV), and the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MDHTTF).

From this vantage point, we see every day that stalking is not a minor or isolated nuisance but a pattern of behavior that often escalates into serious violence. Survivors frequently come to us with a history of repeated, unwanted contacts, surveillance, and threats that predate an assault, an attempted homicide, or other life-threatening harm. When these warning signs are not taken seriously and when consequences are minimal, offenders are emboldened and victims are left to manage escalating danger on their own.

SB 512 is an important step toward aligning Maryland's criminal law with what we know about stalking as a precursor to more severe violence. By amending Criminal Law §3-802, the bill recognizes stalking as a serious offense and ensures that the legal response reflects the true risk these behaviors pose. We are especially supportive of the bill's focus on situations where stalking occurs in direct violation of court-ordered boundaries.

Under SB 512, stalking becomes a felony offense when it is committed while an interim, temporary, or final protective order is in effect against the offender in a case where the victim is the petitioner. The bill also elevates stalking to a felony when there is another court order in place prohibiting the same type of conduct (including conduct defined in §3-802(a)) toward the victim. Treating these violations as felonies reinforces the seriousness of court orders, sends a clear message that boundary crossing will not be tolerated, and provides prosecutors with tools that are more proportionate to the level of risk survivors face when offenders willfully ignore judicial

directives.-crossing will not be tolerated, and provides prosecutors with tools that are more proportionate to the level of risk survivors face when offenders willfully ignore judicial directives.

SB 512 also appropriately targets repeat offenders, including individuals with relevant prior out-of-state convictions. The bill authorizes felony penalties when a person has a prior conviction for stalking under Maryland law or a prior conviction in another state for conduct that would constitute stalking under §3-802(c) if it occurred here. This acknowledges the reality that serial stalkers often cross jurisdictional lines and that survivors are placed at heightened risk when an offender has already demonstrated a persistent pattern of this behavior.

We appreciate that SB 512 modernizes the statute by clearly including stalking conducted in person, by electronic communication as defined in §3-805, and through the use of devices capable of pinpointing or tracking another person's location without their knowledge or consent. Survivors we serve frequently report harassing messages, repeated calls and texts, monitoring of social media, and misuse of GPS or other tracking technologies as part of the stalking pattern. Explicitly encompassing these behaviors helps ensure that the law keeps pace with the ways technology is used to monitor, threaten, and control victims.

For SB 512 to realize its full potential, implementation will be key. We urge the Committee to consider, alongside passage of this bill, a robust focus on training and guidance for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judicial officers on the dynamics of stalking and the updated statutory framework. In our experience, stalking is still too often minimized or treated as a mere "harassment" or "relationship issue," which leads to undercharging, missed opportunities for early intervention, and inadequate safety planning.

We also encourage coordination between law enforcement and community-based victim service providers, including rape crisis and domestic violence programs like TurnAround. Survivors are more likely to remain engaged with the legal process when they have access to advocacy, safety planning, and trauma-informed support alongside a system response that takes stalking seriously. Clear communication about the enhanced penalties in SB 512 can help survivors understand their options and the potential consequences for continued stalking.

By strengthening penalties in the most dangerous stalking cases, addressing repeat offenders, and incorporating modern forms of communication and tracking, SB 512 sends a strong message that Maryland recognizes stalking as an early warning sign for serious harm and will respond accordingly. Coupled with meaningful training and implementation efforts, this bill can improve safety for victims, increase accountability for offenders, and prevent escalation to more severe violence.

For these reasons, TurnAround, Inc. respectfully urges the Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 512.

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