



Tc4health@gmail.com
www.qualequityaccess.com

February 17, 2026

BILL: HB 0656 Income, Sales and Use, and Property Taxes - Revocation of Exempt Status for Nonprofit Organizations for Supporting Terrorist Organizations

COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee

POSITION: Opposed

RE: Statement of Opposition

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Honorable Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am Alita-Geri Carter, the owner of Qualequity Access, LLC., a consultancy grounded in data-driven transformation that advocates for quality, equity, access, and accessibility in healthcare and education. I am the mother of two children with disabilities, a former practicing nursing practitioner, special education parent advocate, and public health servant.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to **House Bill 656**. While the purported goal of preventing the subsidization of terrorism is universally shared, the mechanisms proposed in this bill are constitutionally unsound and ripe for political weaponization. By tying Maryland's tax code directly to federal administrative findings without sufficient state-level judicial review, this legislation threatens the civil liberties guaranteed by both the **First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution** and the **Maryland Declaration of Rights**.

I. Violation of Due Process (Maryland Declaration of Rights, Article 24)

HB 656 mandates the revocation of tax-exempt status if a "federal agency" finds an organization to be in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2339A. This is a dangerous abdication of Maryland's sovereignty and a violation of **Article 24**, which guarantees that no subject shall be deprived of property or privileges but by the "Law of the Land."

- **Reliance on Administrative Fiat:** The bill does not require a criminal conviction in a court of law. Instead, it relies on a "finding" by a federal agency. This lowers the burden of proof from "beyond a reasonable doubt" to an opaque administrative determination.
- **Guilty Until Proven Innocent:** Under the proposed § 2-121(E), once the Comptroller issues a notice based on this federal list, the burden shifts entirely to the nonprofit to "provide information... to prevent the revocation" within 90 days. This reverses the presumption of innocence, forcing Maryland organizations to prove a negative against potentially classified federal intelligence.

II. First Amendment and Article 40 Concerns

The bill's reliance on the federal definition of "material support or resources" poses a severe threat to **Freedom of Speech** (First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution) and **Article 40** (Maryland Constitution).



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- **Chilling Effects on Advocacy:** The definition of "material support" has been broadly interpreted to include expert advice, training, and personnel. For disability rights and humanitarian organizations, legitimate advocacy work could be misconstrued as "support" depending on the geopolitical climate.
- **Weaponization Against Dissent:** In recent months, we have witnessed a disturbing trend where political figures and loyalists have inappropriately labeled opposing groups as "terrorists" to stifle dissent. Legislation that operationalizes these labels into financial penalties invites abuse.

III. The Reality of "Secret Lists" and Wrongful Accusations

The dangers of this bill are not theoretical; they are evidenced by recent testimony regarding the federal government's handling of domestic surveillance. Leadership within the U.S. Department of Justice recently admitted to the House Judiciary Committee that "secret domestic terrorist organization lists" exist yet failed to provide transparent criteria or definitions for how groups are placed on them.

HB 656 would automatically import these secret federal lists into Maryland law without review or approval of the application. We need only look at the tragic deaths of **Ms. Renee Good** and **Mr. Alex Pretti** to understand the fragility of our democracy. Both were publicly labeled as terrorists by reactionary forces before any investigation could occur or meaningful evidence could be reviewed. Had HB 656 been law, the organizations that supported them or advocated for their rights could have been summarily stripped of their status based on those premature and politically motivated labels.

IV. Retrospective Punishment (Article 17)

The bill applies to any organization found to be a terrorist-supporting organization in "any of the 3 immediately preceding taxable years". This retroactive application punishes organizations for past conduct or associations that may not have been designated as "terrorist" at the time, raising serious concerns under **Article 17**, which prohibits retrospective laws.

Conclusion

Maryland must not allow its tax code to become a weapon for federal agencies to silence dissent or punish political enemies. The lack of independent state judicial review in HB 656 makes it a tool for oppression rather than a measure for security.

I strongly urge the Committee to issue an **UNFAVORABLE report on HB 656**.

Respectfully Submitted,
Alita-Geri Carter, MSN, DNP-C, CPNP-PC, BCPA
Resident, Howard County, MD