



March 2, 2020

Chair William C. Smith, Jr.  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: SUPPORT SB 635 (Anti-Swatting Proposal)**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Committee:

Common Sense Media, and its policy arm Common Sense Kids Action (together, "Common Sense"), write to encourage your consideration of SB 635. We strongly support this legislation, which combats deadly "swatting" pranks.

Swatting entails calling in fake police tips to an attempt to send a SWAT team or other emergency responders to an individual's home.<sup>1</sup> It is a growing problem. The FBI estimates that there are 400 attacks per year, and can cost \$10,000-\$25,000 for each emergency response.<sup>2</sup> Swatting can have serious and deadly consequences. In Maryland, more than 40 officers on a tactical team swarmed a residence in Howard County, and shot the swatting victim with rubber bullets in the chest and face, requiring multiple reconstructive surgeries.<sup>3</sup>

While the perpetrator of this crime was caught, often swatters get away with their serious pranks. New technological advances have made it harder to trace spoofed phone numbers, and it can be difficult and time-consuming to catch swatters.<sup>4</sup> These challenges warrant the increased criminal penalties, including jail time and fines, included in SB 635.

The victims and perpetrators of these crimes are often minors. One sixteen year old streaming themselves playing video games on the Twitch platform was surprised by police.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, SB

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<sup>1</sup> A Survival Guide to Teens' Digital Lingo (Dec. 8, 2016),

<https://www.common sense.org/education/articles/a-survival-guide-to-teens-digital-lingo>.

<sup>2</sup> Adrienne Jeffries, *Meet 'swatting,' the dangerous prank that could get someone killed*, The Verge (Apr. 23, 2013), <https://www.theverge.com/2013/4/23/4253014/swatting-911-prank-wont-stop-hackers-celebrities>; Katherine Burgess, *Swatting is 'a potentially deadly crime' that's become 'extraordinarily common'*, Wichita Eagle (Dec. 29, 2017), <https://www.kansas.com/news/local/article192152254.html>.

<sup>3</sup> AP, *Maryland man gets 2 years after swatting that injured victim* (Jan. 18, 2018),

<https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/maryland-man-gets-2-years-after-swatting-that-injured-victim/>.

<sup>4</sup> Jason Fagone, *The Serial Swatter*, N.Y. Times (Nov. 24, 2015),

[https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/the-serial-swatter.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/the-serial-swatter.html?_r=0).

<sup>5</sup> Alyssa Newcomb, *Twitch's wild weekend highlights the risks of 'unpredictable' game streaming platforms*, NBC News (Aug. 14, 2019),

<https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/twitch-s-wild-weekend-highlights-risks-unpredictable-game-streaming-platforms-n1042346>.



635 provides that a first-time violator who is a minor is guilty of a civil offense and subject to proceedings in juvenile court.

We encourage passage of SB 635.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions to 563.940.3296 or via email at [jjerome@commonsense.org](mailto:jjerome@commonsense.org).

Sincerely,  
Joseph Jerome  
Multistate Policy Director