

SB289 Anne Arundel County – Marriage License Applications and Ceremonies
Judicial Proceedings Committee – January 26, 2021
Sponsor: Senator Edward Reilly
Position: Support

Testimony of Scott Poyer, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Anne Arundel County

Thank you Chairman Smith and members of the committee for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 289. For the record, my name is Scott Poyer and I am the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County. My testimony today is not on behalf of the Maryland Judiciary. I am here representing myself as the elected official who is responsible for issuing marriage licenses and performing marriage ceremonies in Anne Arundel County.

I support SB 289 because it offers the flexibility to accept marriage applications and perform marriage ceremonies remotely. As you may be aware, during the COVID state of emergency, Governor Hogan temporarily granted this authority in Executive Order NO. 2020-05-13-02, Dated May 13, 2020. My understanding is that SB 289 seeks to make this authority permanent.

During the approximately eight months that my office has been operating under this authority, we have conducted approximately 500 online marriage ceremonies and processed thousands of marriage applications. I would consider this real world test a success. At the beginning of the state of emergency it allowed some couples to get married who would not otherwise have been able to do so. And later in the state of emergency when we started offering applicants the choice of in-person or online ceremonies, numerous couples chose the online option. The online ceremonies continue to be very popular and do not cost more or take more time to conduct.

The online option may be as popular as it is with the couples getting married because it offers facets that aren't available in-person. For instance, for an online ceremony the couple

needs to be located together and in Anne Arundel County, but the number of guests can be almost unlimited. We have performed online ceremonies with guests on three continents who would not otherwise have been able to participate. We performed a ceremony for people who could not leave their house due to quarantine. We performed a ceremony for a couple in the hospital who just had a baby. And we performed several ceremonies for service members about to be deployed.

One issue that concerned me when we developed our process for conducting online weddings was whether it would increase the potential for child trafficking. However, we built checks into the process, such as requiring signed affidavits, photo ID, and dialog with applicants before the ceremony to ensure both are eligible to marry and that neither appears to be coerced. My opinion is that the security of the online option is approximately equal to the in-person option.

Because of the increased flexibility offered by online ceremonies and an approximately equivalent level of security compared to existing in-person ceremonies, I support SB 289. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.