



Carroll County Board of Elections

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March 15, 2022

Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: SB956 – Support

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher & Members of the Committee:

My name is Katherine Berry and I am writing in support of SB956 – Criminal Penalties – Threats to Public Officials. I have worked at the Carroll County Board of Elections since 2006 and have served as the Election Director since 2015. I have experienced elections on every level beginning as a college intern and then progressively increasing responsibilities as a permanent employee to where I am today as the Director.

Immediately following the 2016 election cycle, elections officially became part of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) "Critical Infrastructures" of the United States. That election seemingly made society, the media, and elected officials think about elections in a different way. There were more phone calls from voters asking questions about the voting processes, more skepticism of the entire electoral process and a greater need to be given the tools to reassure voters of the election results and to secure our voting systems and processes. The local boards of elections quickly learned that being a "critical infrastructure" was much more involved than just the simple terminology. There were trainings, security awareness, advancements in physical security and cybersecurity. The entire electoral process became a more sophisticated agency overnight. Along with the added sophistication of the agency, social media platforms became increasingly important to become more engaged with our voters and communities and it was not uncommon for a story about elections to be on the news every day.

Fast forward to a 2020-pandemic world where election officials were scrutinized for every standard administrative process. We seemed to have worked longer hours than most other agencies in state government and were expected to make sure every voter had a ballot and could vote. This included COVID positive voters who came to vote at our offices in the days leading up to election day. In addition to these conditions, voters questioned many parts of what used to be a standard election process – whether it be voting by mail, counting ballots, conducting audits and asking whether their specific ballot could be located to ensure it was counted. It was not uncommon for voters to call on the phone angrily expressing their frustrations or sending a letter in the mail that was less than pleasant.

Now, in 2022, election officials have experienced written notes from voters on blank mail-in ballot applications that were mailed to them expressing their view on mail-in ballots and making various threats, angry phone calls questioning parts of the electoral process, and even social media posts questioning intentions of election officials. In Carroll County, we have even had two separate incidents of empty pre-paid postage envelopes that were sent with the mail-in ballot applications being returned to the office with no return address and filled with suspicious substances that required a call to the local police department for investigation.

Across the country, election officials are resigning from their positions because of the undue stress of people making threats to election officials and their family members. It is increasingly difficult to educate every voter so that they understand that election officials in Maryland are just average people who were hired to work for state or county government and have taken an oath that they will follow all laws and regulations. All work completed is audited and overseen by a Board that is appointed by the Governor.

Election officials just want to feel safe doing their job and they want to have assurance that their families are safe. SB956 helps to address the changing nature of the job of an election official. **Just like elections are part of DHS "critical infrastructure", so are the people who make elections run so that every vote is counted.** I hope you will consider supporting SB956 and support your election officials. If you have any questions, please contact me at Katherine.berry@maryland.gov.