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To: Members of the House Judiciary Committee
From: Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA)
Subject: HB 978 – Courts – Maryland Court Text Message System – Establishing, Implementing, and Maintaining
Date: February 19, 2024
Position: **Oppose**

The Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA) files this opposition to **House Bill 978 – Courts – Maryland Court Text Message System – Establishing, Implementing, and Maintaining**. HB 978 establishes requires the Administrative Office of the Courts to establish, implement, and maintain the Maryland Court Text Message System; send out certain messages through the System; adhere to certain privacy and data protection and security standards; etc.

MSBA represents more attorneys and judges than any other organization across the state in all practice areas. Through its advocacy committees and various practice-specific sections, MSBA monitors and takes positions on legislation that protects the legal profession, preserves the integrity of the judicial system, and ensures access to justice for Marylanders.

Text communications to case parties, witnesses, and jurors are a powerful tool to meet the need and communication styles of litigants and jurors, increase convenience, and improve access to justice. The Maryland Judiciary currently offers case messaging for specific District Court cases and plans to expand and provide similar service to Circuit Courts and to potential jurors.

HB 978 requires expanded text message services and lists courts which do not currently use the Judiciary’s technology platform. Implementation of HB 978 by the Maryland Judiciary will require significant planning and project design to maintain confidentiality and to gather information related to business entities, courts, and agencies that are not currently within the Judiciary’s information resource system. The proposal would require additional staff and significant expenditures that far exceed the annual budget appropriation included in the bill.

For these reasons, MSBA respectfully urges an **unfavorable report on House Bill 978**.

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