



**Testimony for the Senate Rules and Executive Nominations Committee  
March 30, 2018**

**HB 1342 - Legislative Branch of State Government - Sexual Harassment**

**SUPPORT**

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The American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland (ACLU) supports HB 1342, which will be a substantial step forward in combatting sexual harassment by members of the Maryland General Assembly (MGA).

If the recent wave of sexual harassment and sexual assault revelations has taught us anything, it's that we have not done enough to end sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Maryland is no exception. We need to fix loopholes in existing civil rights laws so that they more effectively compensate those harmed by sexual harassment and gender violence as well as do a better job of deterring it. Civil rights remedies are limited—both in the spheres in which they apply and the actors who may be held accountable. Currently, elected officials and their personal staff are exempted from laws governing the Commission on Civil Rights as well as the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.<sup>1</sup> HB 1342 would close many of these loopholes and revamp the law and recalibrate the power imbalance caused by members of the Maryland General Assembly.

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The current process for reporting sexual harassment at the hands of a member of the MGA is not only cumbersome and lengthy, but it also lacks the accountability that is necessary in order to effectively handle or prevent sexual harassment claims. The bill provides that the Joint Ethics Committee refer complaints alleging that a member of the MGA has violated the Code of Conduct, as provided by the bill, to an outside and independent investigator. The use of an independent investigator eliminates some potential of bias, and mishandling of sexual harassment claims.

As Maryland explores efforts to combat sexual harassment by our elected officials, HB 1342 is a substantial first step. The new legislation would change the process by which victims of harassment can seek justice in a confidential manner. This bill is a starting point to better regulations and tactics to prevent harassment in the state legislative branch.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU supports HB 1342.

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<sup>1</sup> As established by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, *available at* <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm>.