



Senate Bill 535

Public Information Act - Denial of Part of a Public Record - Victims and Witnesses

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Date: February 13, 2020

From: Alex Butler

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 535 as the bill provides reasonable protections against the release of certain personally identifying information relating to witnesses under the Maryland Public Information Act (PIA) for 9-1-1 communication records.

SB 535 would redefine the definition of “Contrary to the public interest” as it applies to discretionary denials under PIA to include situations where custodians reasonably believe that disclosing the requested record would reveal the identity of a witness. Under the bill, “witness” means a witness of specified crimes that include child abuse, homicide, and certain sexual crimes. Current law already provides that custodians have the authority to deny records that would expose a victim, and this bill would extend that reasonable protection to witnesses.

SB 535 is narrowly crafted to protect sensitive information of witnesses to serious, specified crimes, serving to protect these individuals from potential harm that could result from having their identity made public. Accordingly, MACo asks the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 535.