



SB 540 – Human Relations–Civil Rights Enforcement–Powers of the Attorney

General Position: Favorable

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that believes the civil rights of all people should be protected regardless of race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

Residents of Maryland are subject to unlawful discrimination for which they often have no recourse. For example, a vendor may systematically discriminate against people because of their race. When this happens, an individual probably would not have the resources, time, or ability to investigate the vendor and commence a lawsuit. Even if an individual has such resources and their lawsuit succeeds, this would not stop the vendor from discriminating against others.

Maryland residents and works elect the Attorney General on their behalf. SB 540 would authorize the Attorney General to commence a civil action against a person who engages in unlawful discrimination if “after a preliminary investigation” they find “reasonable cause to believe that any person committed a civil rights violation.” SB 540 empowers the Attorney General to seek an injunction to prevent the person from engaging in unlawful behavior, as well as a civil penalty.

SB 540 establishes a “special non-lapsing fund” that consists of money obtained through civil rights lawsuits and money appropriated to the fund in the state budget. The Attorney General may use the fund for enforcement actions and “education and outreach in the community relating to civil rights violations.”

The Attorney General is distinctively able to carry out SB 540. The Office of the Attorney General’s staff and attorneys have broad experience investigating complex cases of wrongdoing and handling lawsuits that result from such investigations. The special fund would provide the Attorney General resources to combat unlawful discrimination and protect Marylanders.

The League urges a favorable report for SB 540.