

Beat: News

Prosecuter wants Mass Threats to become a Felony in Maryland

Prince Georges States Attorney needs law

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USPA NEWS - ANNAPOLIS, MD "" Authorities cannot charge the Maryland man who last year called his former employer and threatened to "shoot the place up" because the state has no laws governing mass threats. The Prince George's County State's Attorney is hoping lawmakers will change that.

State's Attorney Angela Alsobrooks (D-Prince George's) testified Wednesday in support of HB 1250 (Crimes "" Threat of Mass Violence), legislation that would make it illegal to utter violent threats like the one by Neil Prescott, who was arrested after threatening to kill former co-workers at the Pitney Bowes facility in Capitol Heights.

The bill would make a threat of violence against five or more people a felony. Maryland is one of only seven states that lack such a statute, Alsobrooks said Wednesday during a House Judiciary Committee hearing.

The committee held a hearing on the bill Tuesday, but Alsobrooks was unavailable to testify and was allowed to speak Wednesday. No one spoke in opposition at Tuesday's hearing.

Alsobrooks recounted Prescott's actions during her testimony.

"We went to his home and learned that he had quite an arsenal of weapons and ammunition," she said.

According to the state's attorney's office, Prescott had 16 firearms and 40 boxes of ammunition in his apartment at the time of his arrest, but prosecutors determined that he had broken no laws. He is facing a misdemeanor charge of telephone misuse.

Under the proposed legislation, violators would face up to 10 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$10,000.

Alsobrooks said prosecutors are hamstrung when it comes to charging people like Alexander Song, the former University of Maryland student who threatened last year to go on a shooting rampage at the College Park campus.

Song pleaded guilty to two misdemeanor counts: disturbing activities at school and telephone misuse. He was given a six-month suspended sentence and three years of supervised probation.

"We are not interested in implementing severe limitations on a person's First Amendment right," Alsobrooks said. "We want to have tools in place to address very serious threats against people in our community that cause us to use a lot of resources to respond."

The state's attorney hopes the legislation will deter people from making threats while trying to be funny or provocative.

"It's not funny anymore," Alsobrooks said. "We want to let people know that this is very serious."

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