DATE: January 23, 2014

BILL: HB 46 (State Government - Maryland Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act)

COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations

POSITION: Support HB 46

SUBMITTED BY: Tonya Baroudi
President
Law Library Association of Maryland

Chairman Hammen, Vice Chair Pendergrass, and members of the committee:

My name is Tonya Baroudi and I am President of the Law Library Association of Maryland (LLAM) and Director of Library Services at the Prince George’s County Circuit Court Law Library. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 46, the Maryland Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act (UELMA). We support the act with the proposed amendments.

LLAM strongly urges the Committee to approve UELMA, which will ensure that Maryland’s online state legal material deemed official will be preserved and made permanently available to the public in unaltered form.

If online legal material is not authenticated, researchers may not be able to rely on electronic information, courts may not accept cites to online authority, and scholarship publishers may not accept electronic citations. HB 46 will ensure that anyone-- whether a citizen, judge, legislator, attorney, or researcher-- will be able to trust the state legal material available to them online.

HB 46 covers a range of key materials including the Maryland Constitution, session laws, and Code of Maryland. As the courts see an increasing number of self-represented litigants (SRLs), court law libraries are experiencing an equally increasing number of requests for assistance by SRLs as they search for procedural rules and statutes, which are relevant to their cases. Access to legal information is an essential element in the ability to provide library patrons with access to justice. Unfortunately, because the majority of Maryland’s online legal materials are not official and none are authenticated, I cannot point them to a trustworthy online source for this information.

By adopting UELMA, Maryland will establish itself as a leader among states that have recognized that official, electronic legal material must be authenticated, preserved and made permanently available to the public.

LLAM urges the committee to report favorably on this uniform act, as amended.