Testimony of Mary Jo Lazun
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In Support of HOUSE BILL 162
Maryland Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act

Health and Government Operations Committee
February 18, 2015

Chairman Hammen, Vice Chairman Pendergrass, and members of the committee thank you for giving us the opportunity to share with you why the Health and Government Operations Committee should submit a favorable report for Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act.

My name is Mary Jo Lazun and I am here representing the Law Library Association of Maryland. Our members work in law firms, law schools, and court libraries throughout the state.

On behalf of Law Library Association of Maryland, I wish to thank Cathy Vitale for sponsoring this important legislation. Cathy’s sponsorship holds special meaning because her tenure in the House of Delegates will end soon when she assumes the position of Circuit Court judge for Anne Arundel County. The fact that she choose to sponsor the Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act speaks to the importance of this legislation for all branches of government.

The Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act provides access to justice at its most fundamental level. I think we can all agree that access to law, be it codes, regulations or court rules and opinions is required by society. It is why libraries, and law libraries in particular, are key components of our democracy. We provide access to law.

We can also agree that there must be a means to know what the official version of the law is. Without clarity of law our democratic system would quickly unravel.

Finally, we can also agree that live in a time where we have come to rely on electronic forms legal information.

How many of you used the online versions of the Maryland Code or COMAR rather than the books to check on a statute or regulation? How were you sure
that that version was accurate? How do you know you looking at the the current version of code? Maybe you needed a previous version. How did you know it was authentic?

This is why UELMA is so important. When legal materials are available online it is critical that there is a means for everyone: citizens, legislators, attorneys, judges, and law librarians like me to know that the electronic version is accurate.

That is what UELMA does. If the publisher deems the online version of a legal source official, then under ULEMA the government has the duty to provide for its availability, preservation, and authentication.

UELMA provides an outcomes based approach that enables us and our sister states to verify the trustworthiness of the legal material we are using and provides a framework for preserving legal material that allows for permanent access.

At the Maryland State Law Library, where I work, you can find the original Maryland Code from 1860 and its successors from 1914, 1939, and 1957. They are used every day. I need you to make sure that in 2050 those laws you pass this year, and in the decades to follow, are as easy to find as those from the last century. ULEMA is the people’s insurance policy that the law in the digital age will available, preserved, and authenticated.

You now have the opportunity to ensure that your hard work, the laws you pass, the regulations you authorize, and the court decisions you analyze, will always be available regardless of the format. Please return a favorable vote of House Bill 162.

Submitted by,

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