

Chair Prozanski
Vice-Chair Thatcher
Members of the Committee

My name is Gabe Shepherd, and I am a County Commissioner in Benton County. I am writing to voice my support as an individual commissioner for SB 473.

In 2023 the legislature passed a bill that was filed, in part, at my request which changed the law governing executive sessions for local governments. This bill, HB 2806 (2023), allowed local governments to meet in executive session to discuss threats to safety of the governing body, public body staff, volunteers, and security of facilities. I believe that SB 473 builds upon the theme from HB 2806 (2023) of protecting the physical safety of elected officials.

A 2021 study commissioned by the National League of Cities (NLC) states that 81% of surveyed local public officials reported harassment, threats, and violence due to their service at the local level and 87% say the level of harassment is rising.¹ I have spoken with a number of potential candidates for office who have declined to run after considering the level of harassment they will receive and the potential threats to their safety and that of their family.

People have right to petition their government. People have a right to protest and to speak their mind and express their frustration, anger, or displeasure with the actions or inaction of elected officials. This bill would not affect those rights.

I believe SB 473 to be a sensible measure that narrowly focuses in on real threats to physical safety of people who are typically volunteers, trying to improve their community.

I urge your support of SB 473.

Sincerely,

Gabe Shepherd
Benton County Commissioner
e: gabe.shepherd@bentoncountyor.gov
c: (541) 609-9136

¹[On The Frontlines of Today's Cities: Trauma, Challenges and Solutions - National League of Cities](#)