
WOMEN LEAD IN MARYLAND:

PROTECTING OUR RIGHTS

Legislative Proposals

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL PRESENTATION

SCHEDULE*

Group 1 – Facilitator: Angela McDaniel

| Group | Bill Title (Working) | Presenter |
|----------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Stop Silencing Survivors | Lisae Jordan and Del. Sandy Bartlett |
| | Protection of Students from Sexual Exploitation in Schools | Joyce King |
| | Granny's Law | Jennifer Johnson |
| | Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (title TBD) | Karen McDonnell |
| | Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act | Laure Ruth |
| | Coerced Debt Bill | Laure Ruth |
| | Timing of Hearings between TPO and FPO, and Relief for Financial Loss | Laure Ruth |

Group 2 – Facilitator: Jan Molino

| Group | Bill Title (Working) | Presenter |
|----------|---|--------------------------------|
| 2 | Protection of Identity of Victim of Sexual Assault | Saara Khan |
| | Landlord and Tenant - Family Child Care Homes | Corey Johns |
| | Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services-Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act) | Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield |
| | Prescription Privacy Protection Act for Abortion Medication | Robyn Elliott |
| | Menstrual Product Access in Higher Education Spaces | Paula Seabright and Isha Ande |
| | ICE Enforcement Activities (title TBD) | Delegate Nicole Williams |
| | Prohibition of Certain Handgun Sales (title TBD) | Delegate Nicole Williams |

Group 3 – Facilitator: Tahira Mussarat Hussain

| Group | Bill Title (Working) | Presenter |
|----------|--|------------------------------|
| 3 | Know Before They Knock Family Right To Notice Act | Natasha Khalfani |
| | Feasibility Study on Direct Stipends to Caregivers | Kate Stein |
| | Maryland Caregiver Employment Protection Act | Emily Charlap |
| | The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act | Emily Charlap |
| | Birth Certificate Modernization Act | Charlotte Persephone Hoffman |
| | PATH Act (Providing Alternatives through Healing for Justice-Involved Individuals) | Dr. Carmen Johnson |
| | Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program | Laura Weeldeyer |

Questions for all bills in the group will be taken at the end of each group. Please limit questions and remarks to the bill being presented. Please be mindful of time so that all bills have adequate time for presentation and discussion.

**Schedule subject to change based on presenter time constraints.*



Stop Silencing Survivors

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill creates additional protections from retaliatory litigation for sexual assault survivors.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Sara Love

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Sandy Bartlett

Lead Group: Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA)

Lead Group Contact: Lisae C Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel **Email:** lcjordan@mcasa.org

Describe the problem:

Sexual assault continues to be one of the most under-reported and under-prosecuted crimes in America. In Maryland and across the country, rapists are using retaliatory lawsuits to silence those who speak out about sexual violence. Survivors are being subjected to expensive, retraumatizing, and drawn-out litigation, and some are discouraged from ever speaking out.

Of all adult women residing in Maryland, 23.6%, or about 539,291 adult women, have experienced some form of completed or attempted rape in their lifetime. About 54.3%, or 1,240,828 of Maryland's women, and more than 30.7% of Maryland's men, about 674,025, have experienced other forms of sexual violence. (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2016/2017 Report on SA Data Brief.)

Describe your proposed solution:

This bill would provide protection from retaliatory litigation for survivors who disclose sexual assault in good faith, while preserving the right to sue for intentional or reckless disclosure of false information or malicious allegations of assault. It is fair and it is needed for survivors, the majority of whom are women. The bill would provide sexual assault survivors with the same protections that are currently given to employers providing employment references. It provides a practical and effective way to discourage sex offenders from using the courts to silence survivors.

Nearly 1 out of every 5 American women, 18 years or older, has been the victim of at least one attempted or completed rape in her lifetime. (National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief.) This bill will help empower survivors who choose to disclose sexual assault and will help make our communities safer by making it more likely that sex offenders will be identified and held accountable.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Black and Indigenous women who are victims of sex crimes receive less police protection, less interventions, fewer prosecutions of their assaulter, and less assistance. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that for every white woman that reports her rape, at least five white women do not report theirs; and yet, for every African-American woman that reports her rape, at least fifteen African-American women do not report theirs. Reporting Crime to the Police, 1992-2000, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (March 2003), <https://static.prisonpolicy.org/scans/bjs/rcp00.pdf>. African American females experience intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white females, and about 2.5 times the rate of women of other races, (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). 48% of Latinas in one study reported that their partner's violence against them had increased since they immigrated to the US. (Dutton, Mary; Leslye Orloff, and Giselle Aguilar Hass. 2000, Characteristics of help-seeking behaviors, resources, and services needs of battered immigrant Latinas: Legal and Policy implications. Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy. 7(2)). This bill will help empower women of color by removing a barrier to reporting sexual assault.



Protection of Students from Sexual Exploitation in Schools

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill closes a loophole in Maryland’s sexual offense statute by prohibiting sexual conduct between a school resource officer (SRO) and any student at the school to which the officer is assigned, recognizing the inherent power imbalance and duty of care owed to students.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Bill Folden

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Karen Simpson

Lead Group: Maryland State's Attorney's Association

Lead Group Contact: Joyce King, Chief Counsel **Email:** jking1@statesattorney.us

Describe the problem:

Under current Maryland Criminal Law §3-307(a)(4)), it is a crime for certain persons in positions of authority—such as teachers, coaches, and custodians—to engage in sexual activity with students under their supervision. Likewise Maryland Criminal Law §3-314 makes it a crime for a law enforcement officer to engage in sexual contact, intercourse, or a sexual act with anyone they are investigating, assisting, or detaining, or with anyone seeking their official help (including students at their assigned school), unless the relationship existed beforehand and was entirely unrelated to the officer’s official duties.

However, school resource officers (SROs) are not included in these statutes. This omission has allowed cases in which law enforcement officers, assigned to schools to protect students, have instead used their authority, access, and trust to pursue sexual relationships with minors. The lack of statutory clarity makes it difficult to prosecute or discipline these abuses of power and sends a damaging message that some authority figures in schools are exempt from the same accountability as others.

Describe your proposed solution:

The proposed amendment simply adds school resource officers to the list of positions covered under § 3-314, ensuring that SROs are legally prohibited from engaging in sexual acts with students at their assigned schools. This closes an existing gap, strengthens protections for minors, and reinforces the expectation that all adults in authority within schools are bound by the same ethical and legal standards.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Communities of color are often disproportionately impacted by school-based policing and by power imbalances in educational environments. Strengthening the law to include school resource officers will help promote accountability, equity and safety for all students, especially those in historically over-policed or under-resourced schools. Research shows that women of color experience sexual violence at

substantially higher rates: for example, approximately 22 % of Black women report experiencing rape during their lifetime and about 41 % report other forms of sexual violence.

This amendment therefore helps address a known disparity by ensuring that adults with authority over students cannot exploit that role without legal consequence, thereby building greater trust between students, families, and school systems in communities of color.



Granny's Law

One Sentence Synopsis: Correcting Historical wrongs in the Estates and Trust area: A Matter of Equity for Women and Minorities

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Muse

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Stinnett

Lead Group: Leaders of A Beautiful Struggle (LBS)

Lead Group Contact: Lawrence Grandpre Director of Research **Email:** lawrence@lbsbaltimore.com

Describe the problem:

The probate system as a whole comes from a background of slave owners and wealthy men treating women and other classes and enslaved as property. It has its roots in ancient Rome, Medieval England and colonial America prior to the abolishment of slavery. This legislation seeks to correct these historical wrongs by giving more power to caregivers most of which are women.

Describe your proposed solution:

Caregivers often times neglect themselves taking care of others. Most Caregivers are women. Then these same caregivers are forced by the probate system to again repeat this unhealthy practice of putting everyone's needs before their own. This legislation will give more power and authority back to the one who has done most of the work caring for the deceased in life and in death and will actually allow existing language in most people's wills to be actualized instead of the current practice of being ignored by lawyers and judges so they can make large profits.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Yes "Granny's Law" legislation has a beneficial impact on communities of color. Health disparities are plaguing communities of color. Currently the courts care nothing about health disparities. As shown by a judge in the Orphans court saying on record she cares nothing about said policy in this area and by another judge ignoring 8 subject matter experts in the areas of health disparities. However, the courts and judges should care as there are laws and policy in place to help with health disparities. This legislation will help correct historical wrongs and reinforce in the courts, what the Maryland General Assembly already sees as a priority, by having the Subcommittee on Public Health And Minority Health Disparities.



Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (title TBD)

One Sentence Synopsis: The bill aims to address female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) in Maryland by amending the 1998 FGM/C law to strengthen prevention and response measures.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs, House Judiciary, House Health and Government Operations, To Be Determined

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead Group: The DMV Coalition to End FGM/C

Lead Group Contact: Kaitlin Mitchell, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator **Email:** kaitlin@endfgmnetwork.org

Describe the problem:

The bill aims to address female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) in Maryland. The World Health Organization defines FGM/C as the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons, causing irreversible harm and stripping women and girls of bodily autonomy. FGM/C is a human rights violation and an extreme form of gender-based violence that can amount to torture, recognized under international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. FGM/C has been documented in at least 94 countries around the world, including in the United States. Approximately 577,000 women and girls in the United States alone have already undergone FGM/C or are at risk of undergoing it, and over 31,000 of those women and girls reside in Maryland. FGM/C has no health benefits and instead causes serious short and long term complications, including severe bleeding, shock, problems urinating, cysts, infections, complications in childbirth, and even death.

Describe your proposed solution:

The bill aims to amend the 1998 FGM/C law to include additional provisions that prohibit FGM/C and support survivors and impacted communities. The bill will expand the definition of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) to align with WHO's official definition, prohibit the transport of girls for FGM/C outside the state, increase the penalty for performing FGM/C, provide a right to civil action, require mandatory reporting and training for law enforcement, revoke medical licenses for healthcare providers that perform FGM/C, and require the Department of Health to conduct community education and outreach.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

This legislation directly addresses the disproportionate impact of FGM/C on communities of color in Maryland. While FGM/C is often associated with specific regions globally, it is a critical issue within diaspora communities, including various communities of color in the United States. Recognizing this, the bill will benefit communities of color in Maryland by increasing awareness and understanding of the

harms associated with FGM/C. These efforts promote culturally sensitive information, empowering community members to protect girls and women while working to dispel myths and misconceptions. Community engagement and outreach also help build trust between impacted communities and service providers, healthcare professionals, and law enforcement, fostering dialogue and collaboration. Prevention programs can address cultural beliefs and practices, providing alternatives and empowering community leaders to advocate against FGM/C. Support for survivors through civil remedies ensures they receive critical medical, psychological, and legal assistance, which can help reduce stigma and promote healing. Furthermore, these provisions reinforce legal protections, offering survivors a clear pathway to seek justice and accountability, thereby uplifting and safeguarding communities of color.



Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act

One Sentence Synopsis: The Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act closes gaps in Maryland’s protective order system by requiring earlier relinquishment and, when necessary, removal, of firearms from respondents to domestic violence protective orders.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Hettleman

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Bartlett

Lead Group: Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence

Lead Group Contact: Karen Herren/Executive Director **Email:** karen@mdpgv.org

Describe the problem:

In the United States, 4.5 million women report being threatened with gun violence by an intimate partner, and nearly one million have been shot by an abusive partner. The presence of a gun in a domestic violence incident increases the risk that a woman will be killed by five times. FBI data reveals that over 600 women are shot and killed by intimate partners each year—one every 14 hours.

In Maryland, inadequate enforcement of firearm removal from prohibited individuals poses serious safety risks. Despite laws mandating disarmament for individuals with protective orders, pretrial conditions, or certain criminal convictions, enforcement gaps leave many survivors vulnerable. When someone becomes legally prohibited from possessing firearms—whether due to a criminal conviction or a domestic violence protective order—they must comply with the law and surrender their firearms. This is especially urgent in domestic violence cases, where a respondent not in custody may pose a significant threat of using a firearm to harm or kill a family member or intimate partner. While the Giffords Law Center rates Maryland’s gun safety laws highly, with an A-, the lack of comprehensive firearm relinquishment laws remains a critical gap in this framework. Strengthening these laws and enforcing them effectively are essential to safeguarding victims of intimate partner violence.

Describe your proposed solution:

This proposed legislation aims to strengthen firearm transfer requirements within civil court proceedings for protective orders, with specific provisions that benefit survivors of domestic violence, particularly women, who are disproportionately impacted.

1. Immediate and Consistent Firearm Surrender/Relinquishment in Protective Order Cases:

Temporary Stage: Mandate firearm removal at the temporary order stage, building on current policy, which requires mandatory removal at the final stage, to establish a layered safety net.

Timeline: Require immediate firearm transfer when an individual is legally prohibited from possession, with clearer follow up protocols.

Structure the process to build the record: Require the DVPO process to build out the record on the presence or absence of firearms so that law enforcement has probable cause to proceed to a search warrant when appropriate.

This approach closes dangerous gaps in the system, helping protect women from potentially lethal situations during the most volatile times in a domestic violence case. Immediate firearm transfer requirements significantly reduce the risk that an abuser will use a firearm to harm, threaten, or kill.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

This proposed legislation will significantly benefit communities of color, where rates of domestic violence are disproportionately high. Women of color experience violence at elevated rates, with Black women in Maryland dying from domestic violence-related firearm incidents at five times their proportion within the state population. By ensuring the swift and mandatory removal of firearms when protective orders are issued, this legislation reduces the likelihood of lethal violence, addressing a critical risk for Black women and other women of color who are often most vulnerable in these scenarios.

Statistics from the CDC highlight the higher lifetime prevalence of interpersonal violence among Black, Indigenous, and multi-racial women, and rates are similarly high within the LGBTQ+ community. Communities of color, especially those affected by socioeconomic barriers like limited access to education, employment, and safe housing, face compounding risks that increase vulnerability. For example, Black women in urban, lower-income settings, or those relying on income assistance, are particularly at risk.

By closing enforcement gaps in firearm relinquishment laws, this legislation provides additional protections in these high-risk scenarios, helping to prevent firearms from being used in acts of domestic violence.



Coerced Debt Bill

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill would allow victims of coerced debt at the hands of their abuser to be freed from the debt while allowing the creditor to go after the abusive person who actually caused the debt to be incurred.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Economic Matters

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Carl Jackson

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Lorig Charkoudian

Lead Group: MNADV and Economic Action Maryland Fund

Lead Group Contact: Laure Ruth, Public Policy Director, MNADV **Email:** lruth@mnadv.org

Describe the problem:

The coerced debt bill would assist women by providing legal and financial protections against economic abuse, such as relieving them of the obligation to repay them. These laws empower survivors of abuse to sever financial ties to their abuser by offering a legal framework to prove the debt was incurred fraudulently, which helps them begin to regain financial stability and freedom.

Describe your proposed solution:

The bill would provide a framework to prove that debt was incurred as part of a power and control based domestic violence relationship. It would also provide a remedy to creditors who would be able to pursue the abusive person who is actually responsible for the debt.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

A study found that 80% of survivors of color in abusive relationships had coerced debt, compared to 63% of white survivors.

Larger debt burden: The same study revealed that survivors of color had significantly higher average amounts of coerced debt, with many owing more than \$24,000.

Double the average debt: Other research notes that women of color who experience financial abuse face nearly double the average debt burden.

Lower socioeconomic status, which disproportionately affects women of color, can limit access to the resources needed to leave an abusive relationship, such as financial independence, housing, and healthcare. Immigrant women may face language barriers and restrictions on public funds, creating further dependency on their partners. Achieving economic freedom and relief from debt will assist women of color to be safer and free from their abuser.



Timing of Hearings between TPO and FPO, and Relief for Financial Loss

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill would put Maryland in line with the majority of states which have longer than our current 7 days between temporary porection order hearings and final protection order hearings, as well as add repaymetnf or financial oss to the relief that can be ordered in a protection order.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Karen Simpson

Lead Group: MNADV

Lead Group Contact: Laure Ruth, Public Policy Director, MNADV **Email:** lruth@mnadv.org

Describe the problem:

Key obstacles to a short timeline between a temporary protective order (TPO) hearing and a final protective order (FPO) hearing include the requirement to serve the respondent, court delays, and the time needed for all parties to prepare. In Maryland, a temporary order typically lasts for seven days after the respondent has been served, which is a tight window for all procedural requirements to be met. 48 states have a longer time line than Maryland. Survivors are often managing many things in the immediate aftermath of assault or other form of domestic violence that can qualify them for an Order of Protection - immediate physical or mental health issue, help for traumatized children, relocation for safety reasons, seeking advocacy and other assistance. This was the most requested legislative effort asked for of lawyers and other advocates at a MD conference in spring of 2025.

The other often mentioned request was to provide that judge can order repayment for financial loss, such as replacing a cell phone, paying for health services, fixing a broken door, etc. Judges often think they are not allowed to order any relief other than what is in the statute, and our effort to add "any other form of relief" other than relief that a judge determines to be necessary to protect the petitioner's safety," which is limiting language, and may not cover some of the expenses incurred due to the violence.

Describe your proposed solution:

Each year, approximately 500,000 women are physically assaulted or raped by an intimate partner compared to 100,000 men. Three out of 10 women at some point are stalked, physically assaulted, or raped by an intimate partner, compared to 1 out of every 10 men. This bill would lengthen the time between the temporary protection order hearing and the final protection order hearing from 7 days to 14 days, allowing the petitioner to address immediate health, housing or other needs, as well as other issues for the final hearing, e.g., gathering evidence such as police reports, medical records, photographs, and text messages. It may also include securing legal counsel in time for the lawyer to

prepare for the hearing, and time to arrange for witnesses to be able to appear. It will also give law enforcement more time to serve the respondent, which is one of the most frequent reasons to have to reschedule the final hearing.

Adding the ability for the courts to order repayment for financial loss caused by the respondent will assist survivors to achieve economic independence from their abuser.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Statistics show that domestic violence (DV) disproportionately affects Black women at a higher rate than white women. Over 40% of Black women experience intimate partner physical violence, sexual violence, or stalking in their lifetime, compared to 30.2% of white women. Financial barriers, unemployment, and a lack of opportunities are also cited as systemic issues that contribute to higher rates of domestic violence in the Black community.



Protection of Identity of Victim of Sexual Assault

One Sentence Synopsis: Protects identifying information of a victim of sexual assault from appearing in public court documents.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Sara Love

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Michele Guyton

Lead Group: Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA)

Lead Group Contact: Lisae Jordan, Executive Director **Email:** lisae.jordan@gmail.com

Describe the problem:

In 2024 the Maryland General Assembly passed SB 111 to protect the identities of Minor Victims. However, this showed there is still a gap in privacy protections for adults, particularly those who are victims of sexual assault. Survivor's names can easily be accessed and found in public court documents. Victims should not have their names printed with the details of their assault on public documents. This lack of respect for a person's privacy can be a barrier to somebody even reporting these types of crimes because now their personal trauma is going to be out there for anybody to see or exploit.

Describe your proposed solution:

This bill will require the Judiciary redact and shield victims names and their identifying information in court documents automatically, without a special request or any extra red tape that puts an extra burden on the victim. This will preserve the dignity of the survivor and remove a reason why people do not come forward and report these types of crimes.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Statistics show that 80% of sexual assaults are reported by white women, but women of color are more likely to be assaults. Various statistics show that for every black woman who reports her assault, at least 15 do not. Having a survivor's privacy protected can help remove a barrier to these crimes being reported.



Landlord and Tenant - Family Child Care Homes

One Sentence Synopsis: Prevents landlords of single family rental properties from rejecting a family child care home from operating in the unit.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Environment and Transportation

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Michele Guyton

Lead Group: Maryland State Child Care Association

Lead Group Contact: Christina Peusch **Email:** msccaleadership@gmail.com

Describe the problem:

Maryland has lost over 15,000 childcare slots in January 2020. This loss of slots has caused the cost of those slots available to increase dramatically – upwards of 22.7% for center-based slots and 35% for family-care slots. The increased demand with lowering supply will only make this cost go up. This increased cost has had a significant economic impact, with many families having to crunch their budgets even more, or in extreme cases, leave the workforce entirely because the cost of childcare is more than their paychecks.

Describe your proposed solution:

This bill will increase the number of spaces that can be eligible to have childcare spots. With this bill, a provider still needs to have a space approved for a childcare license by the Maryland State Department of Education, but it removes the arbitrary barrier of simply – the landlord doesn't want a person to run a family childcare facility in their single-family rental property. Again, determination is purely arbitrary right now. If a landlord just doesn't want their tenant to run a family childcare home, they can say no. This bill removes that arbitrary barrier and creates slots in places that normally lack childcare – where there is a higher density of rental properties. It also creates opportunities for people, usually women, to start a family childcare business.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Affordable childcare centers are often less available in communities of color, but the demand is often higher. According to data by the Department of Housing and Community Development, over half of renters in Maryland are people of color. Creating more slots in areas where people are renting will benefit these communities even more.



Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services-Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill will require specific procurement processes for the construction of a prerelease facility for women including comprehensive rehabilitative services.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings

Lead Senate Sponsor: Mary Washington

Lead House Sponsor: Charlotte Crutchfield

Lead Group: Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition

Lead Group Contact: Monica Cooper, Executive Director Maryland Justice Project **Email:** monica@marylandjusticeproject.org

Describe the problem:

There is no women's prerelease center that provides comprehensive rehabilitative prerelease services for female incarcerated individuals.

Describe your proposed solution:

This legislation will implement requirements for the construction of a prerelease center for women that will provide comprehensive prerelease services for female incarcerated individuals.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Yes, a majority of the incarcerated women's population consists of women of color.



Prescription Privacy Protection Act for Abortion Medication

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill protects abortion providers from out-of-state criminal, civil, and administrative penalties (e.g. Texas) by shielding their identities, as pharmacies would be allowed to withhold a provider's name and identifying information from the prescription label of abortion medication.

Committees: Senate Finance, House Health and Government Operations

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: Chair Joseline Pena-Melnyk

Lead Group: Women's Law Center of Maryland

Lead Group Contact: Robyn Elliott, Public Policy Consultant and Lobbyist **Email:** relliott@policypartners.net

Describe the problem:

The bill protects abortion access for Marylanders and out-of-state patients by shielding the identity of abortion providers who are vulnerable to legal and physical threats.

Describe your proposed solution:

The bill will support access to abortion care by protecting abortion providers from legal and physical threats by shielding their identities on prescription labels.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Restrictions on abortion care disproportionately impact BIPOC communities. Protecting the safety of providers and patients is critical in ensuring access to abortion services for communities that have been marginalized from the healthcare system.



Menstrual Product Access in Higher Education Spaces

One Sentence Synopsis: This legislation will require higher education institutions receiving public funding to provide menstrual products free of charge in campus bathrooms.

Committees: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs, House Appropriations, House Ways and Means

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Feldmark

Lead Group: Women's Giving Circle of Howard County

Lead Group Contact: Paula Seabright, Advisory Board Member **Email:** paulaseabright@comcast.net

Describe the problem:

The Alliance for Period Supplies reported in the 2025 U.S. National Period Poverty Overview that 2 in 5 menstruators in the United States struggle to afford period products (pads, tampons, liners, menstrual cups, etc.). These products are essential for many menstruators and no one should struggle with access to these products.

College students, whether at a local 2 year institution or in 4 year settings, are often functioning on limited or no income while focusing on their studies. With the rising costs of tuition, room and board, health care, groceries, and the many other costs college students encounter, access to menstrual products should not be an additional barrier in their lives.

The Alliance for Period Supplies reports that 1 in 3 low-income women in Maryland report missing work, school, or commitments due to lack of access to period supplies. By ensuring free access to menstrual supplies in our public colleges and universities, we will give our students a much needed tool to work toward their success. Source: <https://allianceforperiodsupplies.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Maryland.pdf>

Describe your proposed solution:

This legislation will require that menstrual products be available, free of charge, in restrooms on publicly funded college campuses. The legislation, as drafted, will require that products are available in every women's restroom, every gender neutral restroom, and be available in at least one men's restroom per building.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

In Maryland, 1 in 9 adult women (11%) lived in poverty in 2023. Of those, Black women (17%), Latina women (16%), and Native women (20%) experienced even higher poverty rates. We know that higher rates of poverty translate into higher rates of period poverty due to the often inaccessible cost of

menstrual supplies. While this legislation will impact all menstruating students at our higher education institutions, populations with greater need will experience greater positive impact from the availability of menstrual products at no cost to the student. By removing costly barriers to necessary resources, we make it easier for students from all backgrounds to succeed. Source:
<https://allianceforperiodsupplies.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Maryland.pdf>



ICE Enforcement Activities (title TBD)

One Sentence Synopsis: The bill will seek to sunset and prohibit 287(g) agreements in the state; these agreements allow for local law enforcement to be deputized by ICE to carry out immigration enforcement activities.

Committees: To Be Determined

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: Del. Nicole Williams

Lead Group: CASA

Lead Group Contact: Ninfa Amador, MD Policy Manager for CASA **Email:** namador@wearecasa.org

Describe the problem:

This legislation aims to sunset and prohibit 287(g) agreements in the State of Maryland, which are agreements between local law enforcement agencies and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that enhance collaboration in immigration enforcement activities. The recent ramping up of ICE activities in Maryland and across the country has demonstrated how this impacts women by separating families and causing stress and trauma. This legislation serves as just one counter to the expansion of ICE activities in our state.

Describe your proposed solution:

Limiting the expansion of ICE activities in Maryland by prohibiting 287(g) collaboration with local law enforcement will serve as a counter to the federal government's deportation initiative. It will also serve to limit the further separation of families we are seeing as a result of these mass deportations.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Countering the expansion of ICE activities in the state will stand to benefit communities of color who are being disproportionately targeted and impacted by deportation efforts.



Prohibition of Certain Handgun Sales (title TBD)

One Sentence Synopsis: Legislation would prohibit the future sale of handguns that can easily be converted into fully automatic machine guns through the installation of a Glock switch.

Committees: To Be Determined

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: Del. Nicole Williams

Lead Group: Everytown

Lead Group Contact: Kendall Jacobsen, Director of Government Affairs **Email:**

Describe the problem:

Gun violence does not discriminate. Glock switches turn handguns into fully automatic machine guns, which are exceptionally lethal weapons designed for war. By preventing the future sale of handguns that have the potential to be turned into fully automatic machine guns, all communities can be made safer.

Describe your proposed solution:

Gun violence does not discriminate. Glock switches turn handguns into fully automatic machine guns, which are exceptionally lethal weapons designed for war. By preventing the future sale of handguns that have the potential to be turned into fully automatic machine guns, all communities can be made safer.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Gun violence does not discriminate. Glock switches turn handguns into fully automatic machine guns, which are exceptionally lethal weapons designed for war. By preventing the future sale of handguns that have the potential to be turned into fully automatic machine guns, all communities can be made safer.



Know Before They Knock Family Right To Notice Act

One Sentence Synopsis: Know Before They Knock requires the Department of Social Services to provide parents a notice of their rights at their initial contact with the parent.

Committees: House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield

Lead Group: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

Lead Group Contact: Elizabeth Hilliard- Director of Government Relations **Email:** elizabeth.hilliard@maryland.gov

Describe the problem:

This bill addresses the problem of government actors being able to interfere with a parent's right to parent without informing them of their rights. When DSS receives a call of an allegation of abuse or neglect, they are required to investigate that allegation within 24 hours for allegations of abuse and five days for allegations of neglect. Currently, the law does not require that parents be informed of their rights at the beginning of these investigations. So DSS is able to search people's homes, question parents, force them to enter agreements, complete drug test, etc. without informing them of their rights, many of which protect parents from such intrusions by government actors. This bill impacts women because the majority of households investigated by DSS are led by a single parent in poverty, usually a mother. And nationally families led by single mothers are at higher risk of being investigated.

Describe your proposed solution:

The Know Before They Knock Bill would allow parents to be informed of their rights thereby allowing them the right to speak with an attorney before engaging the DSS. Parents would also be aware that they have the right to plan for their children in the event their children had to leave their home. Parents would also be informed that they do not have to allow their children to live out of their home under certain circumstances. This benefits poor women and women of color who are the majority of the mothers impacted by child welfare. It protects their rights to parent their children and protects their children's rights to family integrity. It allows mothers to make decisions that could potentially protect their families from the trauma that occurs from the unnecessary intrusion of DSS into people's homes. To be clear in 2021 out of the 35,000 children whose families were investigated by DSS, on about 6,000 children were found to have experienced some form of abuse or neglect. And of that 6,000 over 70% of those cases were neglect (many of which were related to poverty). So there are thousands of women being investigated by DSS without knowing their rights who are not abusing or neglecting their children. However, in many of these cases these mothers were separated from their children, many for 60 days or longer, while the investigation was happening because they did not know their rights.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Yes. According to a DSS report from fiscal year 2022 of the over 32000 children investigated 43% were Black.



Feasibility Study on Direct Stipends to Caregivers

One Sentence Synopsis: Require the Maryland Department of Human Services to complete a feasibility study on implementing the Supporting Our Caregiver Infrastructure (SOI) program that will provide direct stipend payments to family caregivers who receive no payment for their services.

Committees: House Health and Government Operations, To Be Determined

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Greg Wims

Lead Group: Montgomery County Commission on Aging

Lead Group Contact: Kate Stein, Co-Chair for Montgomery County Commission on Aging **Email:** katelstein@yahoo.com

Describe the problem:

Unpaid family caregiving is a tremendous selfless act. Unfortunately, it requires someone to sacrifice their time and, in many instances, the ability to receive compensation for the work they do. The work of family caregiving disproportionately impacts women, driving labor force exits, perpetuating gender inequality and economic insecurity, and reducing household income. These trends also negatively impact the State by decreasing the labor force and decreasing consumer participation in the economy which is necessary for strong tax revenue.

Describe your proposed solution:

A feasibility is a necessary step in the implementation of a direct stipend program. It will give lawmakers and the Maryland Human Services Department the information they need to implement the program. The program provides family caregivers with the resources to pay for regular and/or respite care to continue their employment outside of the home if they choose to—or to choose to work as caregivers and be compensated for the labor. This will ease the financial burden of unpaid caregivers who, again, are majority women. It also will start to address the crisis of caring for our seniors, whose population is expected to steadily grow in the next 25 years.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Possibly, I am not sure of the demographic data on family caregivers, but it would impact anyone who provides care to family members without pay.



Maryland Caregiver Employment Protection Act

One Sentence Synopsis: The Maryland Caregiver Employment Protection Act would amend Maryland’s employment anti-discrimination law (Md. Code Ann., State Gov’t § 20-606) to add “caregiver status” as a protected class, prohibiting discrimination against workers and job applicants because of their current or perceived responsibilities to care for a dependent family member or loved one in a “familial relationship” as determined by the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR).

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Economic Matters

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Lopez

Lead Group: TBD, we're in talks with a couple

Lead Group Contact: TBD, we're in talks with a couple **Email:** TBD, we're in talks with a couple

Describe the problem:

Under current Maryland law, employers are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, military status, or disability (Md. Code Ann., State Gov’t § 20-606 (2024)). However, there is no explicit protection against discrimination for individuals who provide care to family members, children, aging parents, or other dependents.

Without such protections, caregivers—predominantly women—face significant workplace bias. Employers may deny promotions, reduce hours, or refuse to hire applicants they perceive as less “flexible” due to caregiving responsibilities. Studies show that “family responsibilities discrimination” disproportionately affects women, single parents, and employees of color, who are more likely to shoulder caregiving burdens for children, elders, and family members with disabilities (Center for WorkLife Law, “Family Caregiver Discrimination”, 2024).

While Maryland law defines “caregiver” in several contexts—such as family caregiver (Human Services § 10-701), kinship caregiver (Family Law § 5-534), and lay caregiver (Health-General § 19-380)—none of these definitions currently provide employment discrimination protection.

Other jurisdictions have already acted:

Delaware prohibits discrimination based on “family responsibilities,” tied to the Family and Medical Leave Act (29 U.S.C. § 2612) (Del. Code Ann. tit. 19, § 711(l)). California and New York City have broader definitions, protecting employees who care for a wide range of relatives and “designated persons,” including those with family-like relationships (Cal. Gov’t Code §§ 12945.2–12945.7; N.Y.C. Admin. Code §§ 8-102, 8-107). The District of Columbia includes “family responsibilities” among its protected

categories (§ 2-1402.11). Maryland, by contrast, provides no such protection, leaving workers vulnerable to bias for simply fulfilling family or caregiving duties.

Adding “caregiver status” to Maryland’s anti-discrimination law would align the state with national best practices and reinforce the constitutional principle that all Marylanders are entitled to equal opportunity and economic security regardless of family structure or caregiving role.

Describe your proposed solution:

This bill recognizes the profound impact of caregiving and creates a comprehensive recognition of the diverse situations and relationships between caregivers and those needing care—spanning children, elders, individuals with physical, mental, or developmental disabilities, veterans, and those with chronic illnesses. In Maryland, state agencies such as the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights, the Department of Aging, and the Department of Disabilities would likely support this measure for its inclusive protection of caregivers across all life stages and needs. National and state advocacy organizations including AARP, the National Alliance for Caregiving, The Arc Maryland, Disability Rights Maryland, the Maryland Family Network, and the Center for WorkLife Law would also stand behind this effort to ensure that no Marylander faces workplace discrimination for fulfilling essential caregiving responsibilities.

This legislation proposes to amend Maryland’s employment anti-discrimination law (Md. Code Ann., State Gov’t § 20-606) to include “caregiver status” as a protected class. The amendment would make it unlawful for employers to discriminate in hiring, firing, compensation, or other terms and conditions of employment based on an individual’s caregiving responsibilities.

The bill will be primarily modeled on the New York City Human Rights Law (N.Y.C. Admin. Code §§ 8-102, 8-107), which provides a comprehensive, clear, and administratively workable framework for caregiver protection. The proposed approach would include the following components:

1. Add “Caregiver” to the List of Protected Classes

Proposed Amendment: Insert “caregiver status” into the existing list of protected categories in Md. Code Ann., State Gov’t § 20-606(a)(1).

Effect: It would be unlawful for an employer to “fail or refuse to hire, discharge, or otherwise discriminate against any individual with respect to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because of the individual’s caregiver status.”

Comparable Law: This mirrors language in N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-107(1)(a), which lists “caregiver status” alongside other protected traits such as race, gender, and marital status.

2. Define “Caregiver” Consistent with N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 8-102(30)

Definition:

“Caregiver” means a person who provides direct and ongoing care for either:

(a) A minor child, or

(b) A care recipient, defined as a person with a disability who relies on the caregiver for medical care or assistance with daily living.

Covered Relationships: The term “care recipient” shall include a caregiver’s child, spouse, domestic partner, parent, sibling, grandchild, grandparent, parent-in-law, or any other individual in a familial relationship as recognized by the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights. This means that beyond legally defined family members (like spouse, parent, child, sibling, grandparent, etc.), the MCCR may recognize other significant personal relationships that resemble family bonds—for example, a close friend, a long-term partner not legally recognized, or a chosen family member—when assessing whether discrimination related to caregiving for that person is unlawful.

Rationale: This approach provides a clear and inclusive definition, reflecting modern family structures while maintaining administrative simplicity.

3. Establish Scope of Coverage

Employment Context: The protections will apply to all employers already subject to Maryland's anti-discrimination law, both public and private.

Prohibited Conduct: Includes adverse actions such as failure to hire, termination, demotion, unequal pay, or retaliation related to a person's caregiving responsibilities.

4. Administrative Enforcement and Education

Enforcement: The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights will be empowered to receive, investigate, and adjudicate complaints alleging caregiver-based discrimination, consistent with existing procedures under Md. Code Ann., State Gov't § 20-1004.

Education and Guidance: The Commission, in consultation with the Department of Labor and Commission for Women, will issue interpretive guidance and conduct outreach to employers and workers.

5. Alignment with Existing Maryland Policy Goals

Policy Consistency: This proposal aligns with Maryland's goals of promoting gender equity and family stability, as recognized in the Maryland Equal Pay for Equal Work Act (Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl. § 3-301 et seq.) and the Time to Care Act of 2022 (Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program).

Equity Advancement: By adopting a comprehensive definition of caregiver, Maryland will join other jurisdictions—including New York City, California, and Delaware—in ensuring that employment opportunities are not restricted by family care responsibilities.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Communities of color in Maryland, particularly Black and Latina women, shoulder a disproportionate share of family caregiving responsibilities while simultaneously facing higher risks of employment discrimination tied to caregiving. This inequity is well documented in national research on family caregiving and workplace bias.

According to the AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving (2020), nearly 14% of the 53 million U.S. family caregivers identify as Black, and these caregivers provide more hours of unpaid care per week—often averaging 30 hours or more—than caregivers of other racial or ethnic groups. Over 64% of Black caregivers report being employed while providing care, creating an ongoing conflict between caregiving duties and job security (Lifework at Arizona, "Black History Month: Honoring Generations of Family Caregivers", 2025). Similar trends are observed among Latina caregivers, who are more likely to care for extended family and less likely to have access to paid leave or workplace flexibility (Colorado Health Institute, "An Overlooked Workforce", 2024).

A national study published in the Journal of Clinical Oncology (2022) found that Black and Hispanic caregivers provided more intensive care—spending more hours per week and performing more activities of daily living—than White caregivers, with higher financial strain and emotional distress as a result (National Library of Medicine, "Racial and ethnic disparities in cancer caregiver burden and potential sociocultural mediators", 2022). This increased caregiving intensity, combined with racial inequities in income and workplace support, means that workers of color are more likely to experience negative employment impacts when balancing job and family responsibilities.

Data from the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration (2023) shows that 90% of family caregivers report at least one negative employment consequence—such as tardiness, reduced hours, or turning down promotions—due to caregiving duties (ICI Publications, "The Employment Impacts of Being a Family Caregiver", 2023). Because workers of color are overrepresented in lower-wage or inflexible jobs, they face greater



The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act

One Sentence Synopsis: The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act would prevent the criminalization of people for pregnancy outcomes, including miscarriage, stillbirth, or self-managed abortion, and protect equitable, autonomous reproductive care and gives effect to Maryland’s newly ratified constitutional amendment recognizing reproductive freedom as a fundamental right essential to liberty and equality.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Leslie Lopez

Lead Group: Lead Group: Pregnancy Justice; Reproductive Justice Maryland

Lead Group Contact: Ashley C. Sawyer, Senior Policy Counsel, Pregnancy Justice; Jennifer Mercer, Legislative Director, Reproductive Justice Maryland **Email:** ashley.s@pregnancyjusticeus.org; jennifer@reproductivejusticemaryland.org

Describe the problem:

Across the United States, people experiencing pregnancy loss, stillbirth, or self-managed abortion have increasingly been subjected to criminal investigation and prosecution. These actions disproportionately harm marginalized and medically underserved communities, particularly Black, Brown, and Indigenous women and birthing people, who already face higher rates of maternal mortality and morbidity (Pregnancy Justice, “The Rise of Pregnancy Criminalization: A Pregnancy Justice Report”, 2023).

A recent Maryland case, *State v. Moira Akers*, illustrates the urgent need for legislative protection. Ms. Akers experienced a traumatic home delivery in 2018 and reported a stillbirth. Nevertheless, she was charged with second-degree murder and child abuse, based on her internet search history, her decision to forgo prenatal care, and the results of a hydrostatic “lung float” test — a controversial and scientifically unreliable forensic method used to infer live birth (*Akers v. State*, Maryland Court of Appeals, 2025; Pregnancy Justice, “Maryland Supreme Court Finds Abortion Contemplation Irrelevant Evidence to Prove Murder; Overturns Conviction for Stillbirth”, 2024).

The lung float test, which purports to determine whether a newborn took a breath before death, has been widely discredited by forensic pathologists and medical examiners due to its unreliability. Decomposition, resuscitation efforts, or postmortem gas formation can all cause lungs to float even in stillbirths, resulting in false “live birth” findings and unjust prosecutions (ProPublica, “A Lab Test That Experts Liken to a Witch Trial Is Helping Send Women to Prison for Murder”, 2023; Criminal Legal News, “Lung Float Test: Junk Science Used to Convict Women of Murder”, 2024).

Such flawed forensic practices, combined with systemic racial bias and unequal healthcare access, have resulted in disproportionate criminalization of pregnancy outcomes among women of color. This climate of fear discourages individuals from seeking medical care after pregnancy loss and further exacerbates existing racial disparities in maternal health outcomes. It also undermines the intent of Maryland's constitutional amendment affirming that "every person, as a central component of an individual's rights to liberty and equality, has the fundamental right to reproductive freedom, including but not limited to the ability to make and effectuate decisions to prevent, continue, or end one's own pregnancy."

Describe your proposed solution:

The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act would codify the following key provisions:

Protection from Criminal and Civil Liability

A person may not be prosecuted, charged, or held civilly liable for the outcome of a pregnancy, including miscarriage, stillbirth, or self-managed abortion, whether the outcome is intentional or unintentional. Charges such as manslaughter, homicide, reckless endangerment, child neglect or abuse, or drug-related offenses based solely on pregnancy outcomes are explicitly prohibited unless supported by independent, non-pregnancy-related evidence of harm.

This section directly enforces the constitutional guarantee that the State "may not, directly or indirectly, deny, burden, or abridge the right [to reproductive freedom] unless justified by a compelling State interest achieved by the least restrictive means."

Forensic and Investigative Safeguards

Prohibit reliance on the lung float test as the sole evidence of live birth.

Ban the use of postmortem findings to infer criminal liability without corroborating non-medical evidence.

Prohibit miscarriage, stillbirth, or self-managed abortion from serving as probable cause for searches, arrests, or surveillance.

Privacy Protections

Prohibit collection or subpoena of digital health data (including search history, period-tracking data, or pharmacy records) related to pregnancy outcomes without a court order supported by unrelated criminal conduct.

These privacy protections operationalize Maryland's constitutional requirement that no State action may "burden or abridge" an individual's right to make and effectuate decisions about their own pregnancy.

Protection for Providers and Support Personnel

Clinicians, midwives, doulas, and counselors shall not be compelled to report pregnancy losses unless there is independent evidence of external abuse or coercion.

Providers cannot be penalized or investigated for offering care consistent with accepted medical standards, including support for self-managed abortion or post-loss recovery.

These provisions ensure that Maryland's legal system upholds evidence-based medical standards and does not substitute punitive enforcement for compassionate, patient-centered care. In addition, it brings state policy into full alignment with the Maryland Constitution's guarantee of reproductive freedom as a fundamental right.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

This legislation is essential to advancing racial and reproductive justice in Maryland. Black and Indigenous women experience maternal mortality rates two to three times higher than white women, often due to barriers in access, bias in care, and systemic inequities (Maryland Department of Health, “Maryland Vital Statistics Report, 2023). Criminalizing pregnancy outcomes only deepens these inequities by deterring care, increasing surveillance, and inflicting trauma.

By eliminating the threat of prosecution for pregnancy outcomes and prohibiting the use of discredited forensic practices, this Act:

Promotes trust in healthcare systems, encouraging individuals to seek timely care.

Protects privacy and autonomy in reproductive decision-making.

Reduces racial disparities in maternal health and criminal justice outcomes.

Reinforces Maryland’s leadership in advancing equitable, rights-based reproductive health care.

Advances the constitutional promise of reproductive freedom as a core component of equality and liberty for all Marylanders, particularly those most impacted by systemic injustice.



Birth Certificate Modernization Act

One Sentence Synopsis: The Birth Certificate Modernization Act will make it easier for parents to update their information on their children's Maryland birth certificates, as well as modernize the process for transgender Marylanders updating the gender marker on their own birth certificates.

Committees: Senate Finance, House Health and Government Operations

Lead Senate Sponsor: Clarence Lam

Lead House Sponsor: Ashanti Martinez

Lead Group: Trans Maryland

Lead Group Contact: Charlotte Persephone Hoffman, Policy Director **Email:** charlotte@transmaryland.org

Describe the problem:

Currently, Maryland has an outdated procedure for updating information on birth certificates that does not conform with legislation and policies in place for the Motor Vehicle Administration, Board of Elections, or other state agencies. This affects women in two ways, both in their role as mothers and in their need to have accurate identity documents that reflect who they themselves are.

First, the Division of Vital Records does not have a uniform policy permitting parents to update their own information on their children's birth certificates, requiring many mothers to carry a stack of documents with them in order to prove their relation to their child. In addition to impacting transgender parents—who are often forced to out themselves in order to obtain benefits for their children—it also puts women who have changed their names to escape abuse at significant risk, as they are forced to rely on a document that identifies them by the name they are trying to escape.

Second, under current law, individuals wanting to change the gender marker on their Maryland birth certificate must provide documentation signed by a medical provider affirming that they are transgender or intersex. Given the current federal administration's attacks on access to transition-related healthcare, it is increasingly difficult for transgender individuals to access even basic healthcare, with many providers ceasing care entirely. What had been an unnecessary bureaucratic requirement is quickly becoming a total barrier, especially for young adults. The issue is especially critical as the federal government has severely restricted the ability of transgender people to change the gender marker on their passports, leaving one's birth certificate as a critical document when establishing citizenship and employment eligibility.

Describe your proposed solution:

The Birth Certificate Modernization Act would resolve these issues by creating a standardized process for parents to update their own information on their children's birth certificates, as well as eliminating

the need for a medical provider to sign off on a gender marker change on one's own birth certificate. Both of these changes will significantly benefit women in Maryland, as they will facilitate women being able to have accurate ID documents for themselves and their children that do not reveal sensitive information like former names or transgender status—information that could very easily put both themselves and their children at risk.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

The Birth Certificate Modernization Act would benefit communities of color in two ways. First, because minority-majority areas are disproportionately underserved by medical providers, the elimination of the need to see a medical provider—often multiple times—to obtain the provider's sign-off for a change to your birth certificate would decrease pressure on already-strained provider resources. This is especially critical for areas particularly reliant on Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) or federally-funded insurance programs like Medicare, Medicaid, or CHIP, as the Trump Administration is currently in the process of prohibiting providers at these facilities/receiving this funding from providing transition-related care at all.

Second, communities of color are subjected to heightened surveillance, discrimination, and policing. Having accurate identity documents—including documents that clearly establish your relationship to your children—is critical to minimize the harm of this discriminatory policing. Moreover, having identity documents that do not tell police you are also part of a second minority group—that you are transgender—is crucial to ensure that people already subject to discriminatory treatment are not treated with further indignities and dehumanization.



PATH Act (Providing Alternatives through Healing for Justice-Involved Individuals)

One Sentence Synopsis: The PATH Act provides a pathway for early release and trauma-informed reentry support for incarcerated women of color who are survivors of domestic violence, addressing racial and gender disparities in the justice system and helping them rebuild their lives with mentorship, mental health care, and job training.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Henson

Lead House Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead Group: Helping Ourselves To Heal (HOTT)

Lead Group Contact: Dr. Carmen Johnson, Founder **Email:** Carmen@helpingourselves.org

Describe the problem:

The PATH Act will tackle a serious injustice: many women in Maryland, especially women of color—are imprisoned for surviving domestic violence, while their abusers often face little or no consequences. These women carry trauma from both the abuse and the justice system, which makes healing and reintegration extremely difficult.

This bill creates a pilot program to allow 25–50 women survivors to be released early and participate in a trauma-informed, nine-week reentry and mentorship program. The program provides counseling, guidance, and support services to help them safely reintegrate, pursue education or work, and regain independence.

By addressing the root causes of their incarceration and offering holistic support, the PATH Act restores justice, promotes healing, and empowers women to rebuild their lives safely and successfully.

Describe your proposed solution:

The PATH Act provides a legislative solution to the injustice faced by women, especially women of color, who are incarcerated for actions related to surviving domestic violence while their abusers often go unpunished. The bill creates a pilot program allowing 25–50 women to be considered for early release, paired with a trauma-informed nine-week reentry and mentorship program led by Helping Ourselves To Heal (HOTT). This program offers counseling, mentorship, life skills training, and connections to education and employment, giving women the tools they need to heal, regain independence, and safely reintegrate into their communities. By addressing the root causes of their incarceration and providing holistic support, the PATH Act promotes justice, safety, economic opportunity, and long-term healing for

women, ensuring they have a real chance to rebuild their lives while reducing recidivism and strengthening communities.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Yes, the PATH Act has a significant impact on communities of color, particularly Black and Brown communities, who are disproportionately affected by both domestic violence and the criminal justice system. Women of color, especially, face higher rates of incarceration for crimes tied to survival, such as defending themselves against abuse, while their abusers often men of the same racial background face lighter sentences or no accountability at all. This bill helps address that injustice by providing a pathway for early release and reentry support for incarcerated women who are survivors of domestic violence, many of whom are women of color.

Specifically, the bill ensures that these women receive a trauma-informed, culturally sensitive reentry program, which includes mental health services, mentorship, and job training, all tailored to address the unique challenges faced by women of color. These challenges often include racial discrimination in the justice system, lack of access to community resources, and barriers to economic independence. By offering holistic support, the PATH Act empowers these women to successfully reintegrate into their communities, reduce recidivism, and build a future free from the trauma of abuse and incarceration. Furthermore, the bill prioritizes racial equity by targeting communities that are most affected by these issues, ensuring that women of color are not left behind in a justice system that often fails them. Ultimately, the PATH Act strengthens communities of color by helping empower survivors, reduce cycles of incarceration, and support families in rebuilding lives after trauma



Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program

One Sentence Synopsis: The Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program establishes a statewide network of trained, pre-vetted substitute childcare providers to ensure that childcare centers—many of which are small businesses run by women—remain open and fully staffed during short-term absences, helping to stabilize the workforce, reduce financial strain, and support working families who rely on consistent care.

Committees: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs, Senate Budget and Taxation, House Ways and Means, To Be Determined

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Shaneka Henson

Lead House Sponsor: To Be Determined

Lead Group: Maryland Family Network (MFN)

Lead Group Contact: Laura Weeldreyer, Executive Director **Email:** lweeldreyer@marylandfamilynetwork.org

Describe the problem:

The Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program addresses the critical issue of staffing shortages in childcare facilities, which often lead to closures or reduced services. This problem disproportionately affects childcare providers, many of whom are small businesses owned and operated by women. When childcare workers call out sick or face emergencies, there are often no qualified substitutes available to fill the gap, which disrupts care for children and puts additional strain on working parents, many of whom are also women. By creating a statewide pool of trained, pre-vetted substitute providers, this bill ensures that childcare centers remain operational and continue providing consistent care, which is vital for both parents' workforce participation and the stability of women-owned small businesses in the childcare industry.

Describe your proposed solution:

The Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program creates a sustainable, statewide network of trained, pre-vetted substitutes to ensure that women-owned childcare businesses stay open and fully staffed during staff absences. By preventing closures and service disruptions, this bill supports working women and families who rely on consistent childcare, while also strengthening the financial stability of women entrepreneurs. Additionally, it fosters a collaborative, sustainable network among childcare centers, ensuring long-term resilience and continuity of care across the state.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Yes, the Substitute Child Care Provider Pool Pilot Program has a direct, positive impact on communities of color, where access to reliable childcare is often limited, and many childcare businesses are owned by women of color. These small, community-based centers frequently face staffing shortages, leading to

closures or reduced services, which disproportionately affects families who rely on affordable, consistent care. This bill creates a sustainable network of trained substitutes, ensuring childcare centers stay open and fully staffed, allowing women to go to work without the fear of childcare disruptions. The program also supports women of color entrepreneurs who own and operate childcare businesses, giving them the tools to manage staffing challenges and keep their businesses running smoothly. By ensuring reliable childcare, the bill helps working families of color, particularly mothers, maintain employment, increase their economic stability, and foster long-term community well-being. Ultimately, this legislation strengthens women-owned businesses, promotes workforce participation, and supports the economic mobility of women of color and their families.



2026 Agenda Process and Bill Selection

In the fall, MLAW hosts its Fall Agenda Conference. Advocacy and women's groups were invited to present legislative initiatives for consideration. The criteria for initiatives to be presented at the conference are:

- Addresses an issue related to women's health, women's personal safety at home, in public, in school, and in the workplace; the ability to achieve and maintain economic independence; or freedom from discrimination in Maryland's economic, educational, judicial, political, and social system;
- Can be addressed through the legislation in the Maryland General Assembly;
- Has a reasonable chance to move successfully through the legislative process;
- Has an identifiable, sustainable lead group that can shepherd the bill.
- The lead group must:
 - Be a Maryland-based group or a national group with a strong on-the-ground presence in Maryland;
 - Have issue-area expertise and/or a track record of supporting legislation/advocacy in areas related to this proposal;
 - Have an identified representative who will be in regular contact with the MLAW Board of Directors about the progress of the legislation; and
 - Regularly provide legislative updates and supportive materials for MLAW to share with our members so that they can take action.

In 2020, we added a requirement that all legislative proposals submitted for consideration for the annual MLAW Legislative Agenda must include information about racial impact and be reviewed by the Board of Directors using a racial equity lens.

Following a successful conference, the Board of Directors will meet to review the proposed initiatives and ensure that they meet this criteria. Bills that meet the criteria will be placed on a ballot and sent to all MLAW members in good standing. Members will vote for the initiatives and the top ranking bills will comprise the **2025 Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women.**