



**MLAW**  
Maryland Legislative  
Agenda for Women

# 2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



## 1994 - 2026

### 32 Years of Advocacy for Women's and Family Issues

**MLAW is the only statewide coalition of women's groups and individuals that provides a non-partisan, independent voice for Maryland women and families.** MLAW harnesses the **collective power of women** by mobilizing, coordinating and collaborating with networks, groups, and individuals from all over the state to **advocate for the passage of legislation to promote and protect the well-being of women and their families in Maryland.**

This call to action for legislative change has resulted in a coalition almost unique in the United States. The annual legislative conference and other activities have energized thousands of women, and male allies, to become engaged in advocacy for important issues affecting Maryland women and families.

The annual Legislative Agenda has included a broad diversity of issues and the organization's advocacy and collaborative efforts have resulted in the **passage of 124 pieces of legislation enacted by the Maryland General Assembly** since its inception.

This extraordinary success has made **a significant difference for women and families.** It has established MLAW as a **powerful voice for women and their priorities in Maryland.**

**MLAW provides visibility for legislation affecting women and families.** The fall conference develops our MLAW Legislative Agenda and an annual legislative briefing during the legislative session introduces the Agenda to advocates and legislators. These events focus legislators' attention on our issues and raise their visibility throughout the state. We distribute the annual Legislative Agenda to every Maryland legislator. In collaboration with our advocacy partners, we submit testimony, advocate for bills, and promote our Agenda through our large e-mail list, website, and Facebook page.

The Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women is proud of its achievements during the last 32 years, but there is more to be done. **Join us and help us continue to make a difference for Maryland women and families.**



## Overview

The Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) is a statewide coalition of women's groups and individuals formed to provide a non-partisan, independent voice for Maryland women and families. The coalition advocates for progressive legislation and policies that promote and protect the well-being of Maryland women and their families and provide them opportunities to develop their full potential.

### Our Vision

Maryland women and their families have a right, by law, to an adequate and sustainable quality of life and an opportunity to develop their full potential.

### Guiding Principles

- An adequate standard of living regardless of ability to work or achieve financial independence
- Personal safety at home, school and the workplace
- Freedom from discrimination in Maryland's economic, educational, judicial, political, and social system
- Equal access to quality health care and reproductive services
- Safe and affordable child and dependent care
- A quality, public education
- Equitable and responsible implementation and enforcement of rights and protections provided by existing law
- Elimination of discriminatory policies and practices based on age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities and attributes, race, and sexual orientation
- Family-friendly employment practices

## Board of Directors

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## Statement on Racism

The Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) unequivocally supports the Black Lives Matter movement and stands in solidarity with African American communities as an ally in the fight against systemic racism, racial injustice, and discrimination.

Diversity and equity are two of the core values through which MLAW strongly advocates for its legislative priorities centered around addressing issues of concern to women and that also disproportionately affect communities of color.

Too often, well-intended advocacy efforts ignore the unique challenges of the very communities the efforts aim to support. We are committed to ensuring that we are not just opposed to systemic racism and racist policies, but that we as an organization are actively working towards anti-racist solutions. As we work collaboratively with our members and partner networks towards solutions, we will be more deliberate about establishing meaningful relationships and dialogue with the communities being supported.

To that end, the MLAW Board of Directors will ensure the following:

1. 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.
2. The MLAW Legislative Agenda will include at least one racial equity bill per legislative session.
3. Presenters, sponsors, and advocates for proposed legislation and attendees at our events will be representative of the diverse and wonderful communities that we seek to uplift and support.
4. MLAW's Board of Directors and membership will represent diversity in perspectives, ideas, culture, backgrounds, race, and ethnicity.
5. MLAW will ensure broader and consistent outreach to gain a more diverse membership and increase engagement in MLAW's education and advocacy efforts.

For 29 years MLAW has provided a non-partisan, independent voice for Maryland women and families, and we will continue to strive to be an organization that is committed to advocating for anti-racist, progressive legislation and policies that promote and protect the well being of Maryland women and their families and provides them opportunities to develop their full potential.



## Statement on Roe vs. Wade

The SCOTUS decision to overturn Roe v. Wade is a devastating blow to a fundamental human right that people in this country have been able to access for decades and generations. Removing access to abortion will have dire—life-threatening—consequences for women across this country. Overturning 50 years of precedent significantly undermines reproductive freedom and a woman’s bodily autonomy.

The evisceration of this human right significantly limits health care for women, deepens racial disparities, will increase maternal mortality rates, and will have particularly dangerous consequences for low-income women and women of color. The travesty of this politicized decision will overwhelm mental health services, foster care providers and social services agencies with potentially disastrous outcomes.

Forcing pregnant people and minors to carry a pregnancy to term, regardless of circumstance, or worse, having to prove that a rape or incest has occurred, is not only invasive but unnecessarily cruel and dehumanizing. Women deserve better than that.

Make no mistake, this decision is just the tip of the iceberg to take away the most basic human rights, and we stand ready to work with our partners in protecting the autonomy and privacy of Marylanders' lives.

We are proud to have supported the successfully passed Abortion Care Access Act in the 2022 legislative session. This bill, which will expand abortion providers and training, will be necessary to help ensure that Maryland women as well as pregnant people who come to Maryland from across the country receive the vital care they need when they are making the most deeply personal choices of their lives.

As we have for decades, MLAW will continue to support Marylanders' full autonomy and vociferously put our full weight behind supporting Marylanders' access to abortion.

# 2026 MLAW SUPPORTERS

## Organizations

AAUW Anne Arundel County  
AAUW Kensington-Rockville Branch  
AAUW Maryland  
AAUW Garrett Branch  
American Association of University Women Howard County Branch  
Baltimore County Commission for Women  
Bound for Better, advocates for Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse  
Campaign for Eneshal Galloway at Large Candidacy  
Carroll County Chapter NOW  
Crabs On The Shore  
Jack and Jill of America Western Maryland Chapter  
Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA)  
Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV)  
Maryland NOW  
Montgomery County Business and Professional Women  
Montgomery County Commission for Women  
Montgomery County Chapter, National Organization for Women  
National Association of University Women, Prince George's County  
NAUW  
Postpartum Support International, Maryland  
Prince George's County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.  
Self-Reflections: Social-Emotional, Behavioral and Advocacy Services, LLC  
Stella's Girls, Incorporated  
SUB&S LLC  
The Heart Nest  
The Rest Of A Life (TROAL)  
Top Ladies of Distinction, Incorporated, Patuxent River Chapter  
Unrooted Culture  
Women's Commission for Baltimore City  
Women's Equity Center and Action Network  
Women's Law Center of Maryland  
Zonta Club of Annapolis

# Individuals

Kionne Abdul-Malik	Sheen Foster	Eileen Metnon	Maria Smith
Nas Afi	Cassandra Freeman	Ciarra Miles	Karen Spar
Lillian Agbeyegbe	Amy Froide	Tracy Miller	Jennifer Spencer
Mekih Amare	Michele Fuller	Clara Miller	Kate Campbell Stevenson
Susan Anderson	Gerda Gallop-Green	Jan Molino	Hasena Tahal
Wandra Ashley-Williams	Joanne Gallos	Anamika Moore	Susan Talbott
Angela Austin	Mary Gant	Yonelle Moore Lee, Esq.	Jan Thorman
Lee Bachu	Wendy Gibbs	Jessica Morgan	Rebecca Turner
Diana M Bailey	Lynn Gilbert	Pilar Morgan	Janet Vernon
Renee Banks	Mary Gordon	Joyce Moyer	Keysha Walker
Mae Beale	Mary Ann Gorman	Margaret Murray	Helene Waranch
Dian Belanger	Nancy Green	Samantha Nagy	Sandra Weinstein
Michelle Bell	Beth Hayden	Sabrina N'Diaye	Melanie White
Sandy Bell	Barbara Hays	Pat Nordstrom	Duane White
Sammie Bell	Marci Hodge	Nancy Nyland	Jordin White
Kara D. Beverly	Susan Horst	Lynn Olson	Hannah Wilcove
Silvia Blitzer Golombek	Scott Houston	Katie O'Malley	Nekesha Williams
Mara Braverman	Jeannine Hunter	Lauren Peters	Deborah Williams
Erin Brown	Tahira Hussain	Crystal Peters	Dianne Williams
Tracy Brown	Ella Iams	Diana Philip	Sandra Wilson-Barnes
Jan Bryant	Kathy Jackson	Michelle Pickens	Joan D. Winship
Heidi Buchanan Schmidt	Aubrey Jackson Soller	Marylin Pierre	Pamela Wright
Danelle Buchman	Cynthia Jacobs	Carla Poindexter	Aubrie Zepp
Jan Butts	Kaprece James	Jennifer Pollitt Hill	
Linda Calvert	Lori James	Sara Powel	
Judy A. Carbone	Elizabeth Joyce	Sylvia Randolph	
Marilyn Carlisle	Carolyn Keaton Culp	Heather Reichardt	
Donna Cawley	Lois Kelberman	Emma Reid	
Alice Chambers	Roxann King	Pamela Richardson	
Tara Clifford	Cherie King	By Roberts	
Michael Cohen	Djessa Kouyate	Diane Roca	
Sharon Gibbs Cooper	Renee Kwakye	Anita Rosen	
Brandy Curtis Richards	Kara Lewis	Diana Rubin	
Monica Dailey	Cynthia Lifson	Laurence Ruth	
Deborah Daniel	Leanne Listman	Melissa Schaming	
Paige Davis	Emma Loftus	Paula Seabright	
Sharon Davlin	Clara Malafarina	Bonnie Sermons	
Dr. Dione Dillard	Carolyn Manley	Amy Sheinin	
Sylvia Diss	Barbara Marder	Jo Shifrin	
Norsia Duncan	Rachel Marquez	Lew Sichelman	
Tiawana Edge	Angela McDaniel	Tevis Simon	
Marcia Elbrand	Stephanie McGencey	Michelle Simonds	
Claire Ernst	Mary McGrath	SMonique Smith	
Nikita Evans	Kathy McKnight	Nicole Smith	
Sophia Ewing	Dr. Michele S. McKoy	Preston Smith	
Jeannette Feldner	Niamh McQuillan	Sheila Smith	

*\*The names of individuals and organizational supporters may only support some components of the agenda that pertain to their mission and work.*



## 2026 Agenda Process and Bill Selection

In November, MLAW hosted 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 were:

- 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.

Last year 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 met to review the legislation and ensure that it met the criteria. Bills that met the criteria were placed on a ballot, which was distributed to the MLAW membership. Members were asked to vote for the initiatives that would comprise the **2026 Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women.**



## **Criminal Law - School Resource Officers - Prohibition on Sexual Activity with Students**

**Bill Numbers:** [HB329/SB81](#)

**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, Deputy State’s Attorney **Email:** [jking1@statesattorney.us](mailto: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.



## **Civil Actions - Immunity - Disclosure of Allegations of Sexually Assaultive Behavior (Stop Silencing Survivors Act)**

**Bill Number:** [HB465/SB295](#)

**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 Elizabeth Embry

**Lead Group:** Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA)

**Lead Group Contact:** Lisae C Jordan, Executive Director **Email:** [lcjordan@mcasa.org](mailto: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.



## **Criminal Procedure - Protection of Identity of Victim of Sexual Assault or Stalking**

**Bill Number:** [HB450/SB294](#)

**One Sentence Synopsis:** Protects identifying information of a victim of sexual assault or stalking 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:** [lcjordan@mcasa.org](mailto:lcjordan@mcasa.org)

### **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 or stalking. 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. Offenders have even used these court records to locate survivors, particularly in stalking cases.

### **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.



## **Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act**

**Bill Numbers:** [HB83/SB20](#)

**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](mailto: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.

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.



## Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services-Female Incarcerated Individuals

**Bill Numbers:** [SB187](#)/HB \_\_\_\_

**One Sentence Synopsis:** This bill will require that DPSCS meet certain locational, acreage, bed-capacity and programming requirements in the construction and operation of the women's prerelease center required by the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act of 2021 to ensure that the facility provides adequate space for programming, outdoor space, and bed capacity for all women in prerelease status now and into the future. The bill also requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to provide those services at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCI-W) prior to completion of the women's prerelease center.

**Committees:** Senate Judicial Proceedings; House Government, Elections, and Labor

**Lead Senate Sponsor:** Senator Mary Washington

**Lead House Sponsor:** Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield

**Lead Group:** Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition

**Lead Group Contact:** Monica Cooper, Executive Director, Maryland Justice Project **Email:** [monica@marylandjusticeproject.org](mailto:monica@marylandjusticeproject.org)

### **Describe the problem:**

There is no women's prerelease center that provides comprehensive rehabilitative prerelease services for female incarcerated individuals. The Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act of 2021 required the construction and operation of such a facility by 2023, but the facility has not been designed and built. The current plans developed by the Department of General Services and DPSCS are unacceptable in a number of key respects:

- The selected site, 717 Forrest Street, Baltimore City, is located in a dangerous, high drug-trafficking area within the Pre-Trial and Detention Center Complex
- The area of the site is too small to accommodate the facility and green outdoor space needed for the women and their families
- The small bed capacity of the facility will not accommodate all the women eligible to be housed at the facility

- The women's critical therapeutic programming will be held at the to-be-built Baltimore Therapeutic Treatment Center, a co-ed maximum-security detention facility not geared to the needs of women who are returning from long incarceration

**Describe your proposed solution:**

This legislation will implement requirements for the construction of a prerelease center for women that will require the site to be at least three acres in size, provide adequate bed capacity, and will require the facility to be built no closer than one mile to any DPSCS corrections facility. The bill also required DPSCS to provide comprehensive prerelease services for female incarcerated individuals at MCI-W until the facility is operational.

**Benefit to Communities of Color:**

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



## Family Law - Temporary and Final Protective Orders - Duration and Relief

**Bill Number:** [HB497/SB433](#)

**One Sentence Synopsis:** This bill would put Maryland in line with the majority of states which have longer than our current seven (7) days between temporary protection order hearings and final protection order hearings, as well as adding repayment of financial loss to the relief that can be ordered in a protection order.

**Committees:** Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

**Lead Senate Sponsor:** Senator Sara Love

**Lead House Sponsor:** Delegate Karen Simpson

**Lead Group:** Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV)

**Lead Group Contact:** Laure Ruth, Laure Ruth, Public Policy Director **Email:** [lruth@mnadv.org](mailto: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. Forty-eight (48) states have a longer timeline 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 by lawyers and other advocates at a Maryland 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.



## **Coerced Debt Bill**

**Bill Number:** SB\_\_\_\_/HB\_\_\_\_

**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:** Economic Action Maryland Fund and Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV)

**Lead Group Contact:** Marceline White, Executive Director **Email:** [marceline@econaction.org](mailto:marceline@econaction.org)

**Lead Group Contact:** Laure Ruth, Public Policy Director **Email:** [lruth@mnadv.org](mailto: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.



## The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act

**Bill Number:** SB \_\_\_/HB \_\_\_

**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:** TBD

**Lead House Sponsor:** Delegate Lesley Lopez

**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](mailto:ashley.s@pregnancyjusticeus.org); [jennifer@reproductivejusticemaryland.org](mailto:jennifer@reproductivejusticemaryland.org)

### **Describe the problem:**

Across the U.S., people experiencing pregnancy loss, stillbirth, or self-managed abortion are increasingly being criminally investigated or prosecuted—disproportionately harming Black, Brown, and Indigenous women and birthing people, who already face higher maternal mortality rates (Pregnancy Justice, 2023). A Maryland case, *State v. Moira Akers*, highlights the urgent need for reform: after reporting a stillbirth in 2018, Ms. Akers was charged with second-degree murder and child abuse based on her internet searches, lack of prenatal care, and the use of the discredited “lung float” test—a scientifically unreliable method claiming to prove live birth (Maryland Court of Appeals, 2025).

The lung float test has been widely debunked, as factors like decomposition or resuscitation can cause lungs to float even in stillbirths, leading to false findings and wrongful prosecutions (ProPublica, 2023). Such flawed forensics, compounded by racial bias and unequal healthcare access, have led to the disproportionate criminalization of pregnancy outcomes for women of color.

This punitive climate deters people from seeking care after pregnancy loss and worsens racial disparities in maternal health. It also undermines Maryland's constitutional protection of reproductive freedom, which affirms every person's right to make and carry out decisions to prevent, continue, or end a pregnancy.

#### **Describe your proposed solution:**

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

- Prohibit criminal or civil penalties based solely on pregnancy outcomes. 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";
- Institute forensic and investigative safeguards including banning unreliable forensic practices such as the "lung float test" and prohibiting miscarriage, stillbirth, or self-managed abortion from serving as probable cause for searches, arrests, or surveillance;
- Protect the privacy of pregnant people by restricting the use of personal digital data; and
- Safeguard providers who deliver compassionate, evidence-based reproductive care.

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.



## **Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition**

**Bill Number:** [HB444/SB245](#)

**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:** Judicial Proceedings; House Judiciary

**Lead Senate Sponsor:** Senator William Smith

**Lead House Sponsor:** Delegate Nicole Williams

**Lead Group:** CASA

**Lead Group Contact:** Ninfa Amador, Maryland Policy Manager **Email:** [namador@wearecasa.org](mailto: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.

# Demonstrate Your Womanpower with MLAW

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO TAKE ACTION ON LEGISLATION

MLAW (Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women) is a statewide group of organizations and individuals working to provide an independent, non-partisan voice advocating for critical legislation and policies affecting women and their families. Visit our website at [www.mdlegagendaforwomen.org](http://www.mdlegagendaforwomen.org) for more information.

**Here are a few steps you can take to stay informed about legislation you care about and to let your legislators know your position.**



**SIGN UP FOR MLAW'S YAHOO LIST SERVE** to receive information, updates, alerts, and other information of interest.



**LEARN MORE** about the issues you care about.



**CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS** during the session:

- ★ Call, write, e-mail, fax or visit legislators to express your support or opposition to legislation. You can find who your state legislators are, their contact information, copies of bills, hearing schedules and more at <http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite>
- ★ Contact the lead group or groups to find out more about what you can do to support or oppose legislative proposals or other issues.
- ★ Attend a legislative hearing and be a visible supporter.
- ★ Submit written or give oral testimony.
- ★ Find out how your legislators voted – and hold them accountable – by letters or by your next opportunity to vote for them.



**SPREAD THE WORD** – promote the MLAW Agenda and other issues to friends and colleagues and encourage them to take action.



**MAINTAIN FOCUS** on key areas: health care, reproductive rights, economics, family law, domestic and sexual violence.



**JOIN MLAW** to support an independent voice for women's and family issues.



**PARTICIPATE** – and build women's collective power.

Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women

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*Celebrating 32 Years of Advocacy: 1994-2026*

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- ☐ \$40 - Individual
- ☐ \$75 - Organization revenue under \$25,000
- ☐ \$125 - Organization revenue over \$25,000
- ☐ \$25 - Student

*If you are joining as both an individual and an organization, please complete a separate form for EACH membership.*

#### ***I Want to Do More by Making an Additional Donation***

- ☐ \$500   ☐ \$250   ☐ \$100   ☐ \$50   Other \_\_\_\_\_

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*Please spell out organization name. No acronyms.*

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**IMPORTANT!** Please include an email address. Most of the business of MLAW will be conducted via email.

**Mail this completed form along with your check to:**

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