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Agenda for Women

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Legislative Proposals

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL PRESENTATION SCHEDULE*

Group 1 – Facilitator: Angela McDaniel

Group	Bill Title (Working)	Presenter
1	Access to Forensic Exams for Rape Survivors	Lisae C Jordan
	Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act	Karen Herren
	Domestic Violence - Law Enforcement Training and Information Sharing (Jacobi Jones Act)	Jennifer Mercer
	Family Law - Protective Orders - Financial Relief	Jennifer Mercer
	211 Privacy Protections	Emily Charlap
	The Coerced Debt – Debtor Protections Act	Emily Charlap

Group 2 – Facilitator: Liz Joyce

Group	Bill Title (Working)	Presenter
2	The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act	Emily Charlap
	Health Insurance - Ovarian Cancer Prevention With Salpingectomy - Required Coverage and Prohibited Cost Sharing	Delegate Terri Hill
	Menstrual Product Access Bill	Delegate Terri Hill and Isha Ande
	2027 Save Maryland Health Care Act	Stephanie Klapper
	2027 Prescription Drug Affordability Act	Stephanie Klapper

Group 3 – Facilitator: Tahira Mussarat Hussain

Group	Bill Title (Working)	Presenter
3	Missing and Murdered American Indian and Alaskan Native Women and Girls – Day of Awareness and Reporting Requirement	Delegate Terri Hill
	Felony Murder Repeal	Elizabeth Hilliard
	Family Law - Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations ("Know Before They Knock" Family Right to Notice Act)	Natasha Khalfani
	End Wrongful Charging Practices	Tiffany Holley, Anne Arundel District Court Supervisor with the
	Criminal Procedure – Sentencing – Domestic Violence as a Mitigating Factor (PATH ACT – Providing Alternatives Through Healing for Justice Involved Individuals	Carmon Johnson

Group 4 – Facilitator: Cassandra Freeman

Group	Bill Title (Working)	Presenter
4	Equal Pay Commission – Staffing and Governance	Ariana Kelly
	Nursing Home Financial Accountability Act	Loraine Arikat
	The Maryland Caregiver Employment Protection Act	Sara Westrick
	Maryland Construction Workforce Health and Sanitation Act	Minah Woo, MCCEI and Ambre Schaffer of ABC Greater Baltimore
	Granny's Law	Jennifer Elsie Johnson
	Department of Housing and Community Development Operating Budget - Community Schools Rental Assistance Program	Katie Davis

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.*

Access to Forensic Exams for Rape Survivors

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill requires that all hospitals with an emergency room have sexual assault forensic exams available on site.

Committees: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs, House Health and Government Operations

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Shelly Hettleman

Lead House Sponsor: Chair Sandy Bartlett

Lead Group: Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault

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, only about half of hospitals with emergency rooms are willing provide sexual assault survivors with sexual assault forensic exams (SAFEs), and many of those hospitals lack 24/7 availability. This places tremendous burdens on sexual assault survivors.

Survivors are asked to travel from one hospital to another to get the care they need and to have evidence collected. Maryland's sexual assault programs have helped several survivors who have gone to three hospitals before getting an exam. Garrett County has no SAFE program, and even larger jurisdictions such as Howard County, have had to ask survivors to have an exam in another county. Two years ago, Maryland enacted legislation permitting peer-to-peer "teleSAFE", where a forensic nurse in one location coaches a nurse who is with the patient in another location to perform an exam. This process has been successful in other states, such as Pennsylvania, but hospitals without SAFE programs have not adopted the practice. Not only does this process harm survivors, it also risks losing evidence. Evidence of sexual assault - particularly drug-facilitated sexual assault - must be collected quickly to be useful if a survivor chooses prosecution.

Of all adult women residing in Maryland, 19%, or about 457,000 adult women, have experienced some form of completed or attempted rape in their lifetime. About 44%, or 1,058,000 of Maryland's women, and more than 23% of Maryland's men, about 520,800, have experienced other forms of sexual violence. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Crime Victimization Survey, 1992-2015)

Describe your proposed solution:
This bill would require that any hospital with an emergency room provide on-site sexual assault forensic exams. Hospitals could hire forensic staff, enter agreements with other hospitals to send nurses from a

SAFE program, or use TeleSAFE. The requirement to provide exams would begin July 1, 2028 to allow for planning and capacity building.

Access to sexual assault forensic exams is needed for survivors, the majority of whom are women. 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 support survivors who choose to seek a forensic exam 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 estimated 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 obtaining sexual assault forensic exams.

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 in to domestic violence protective orders.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senators Shelly Hettleman and Will Smith

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Sandy 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 removal 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 removal 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.

Domestic Violence - Law Enforcement Training and Information Sharing (Jacobi Jones Act)

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill will require police officers to receive both initial and biannual in-service training in domestic violence, as well as to provide survivors with at least one referral to a comprehensive sexual assault/domestic violence service provider on each call.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Carl Jackson

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Karen Simpson

Lead Group: Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence

Lead Group Contact: Jennifer Mercer, Public Policy Director **Email**: jmercer@mnadv.org

Describe the problem:
When law enforcement is called due to intimate partner violence, survivors report mixed results. A 2024 focus group conducted with survivors across Maryland found that police officers were most commonly the first people survivors turned to for help. However, that same focus group found that for many survivors, the help they hoped to receive was illusory. Survivors reported that officers were often ill-prepared to handle these calls with the knowledge, discretion, and sensitivity required. For officers, these calls are high-risk and difficult due to the nature of the relationship between victim and suspect. This poses special challenges in the investigation and prosecution of domestic violence offenses that cannot be adequately addressed by procedures for other types of criminal investigations.

Maryland law mandates several topics that must be covered during initial law enforcement training and/or in-service law enforcement training. These topics include use of force, rape and sexual assault, recognition of human trafficking, and detection of electronic methods of stalking, among others.

Domestic violence is not on that list. Given the prevalence of domestic violence across communities of all kinds, the inherently dangerous nature of these calls, and the recent increase in intimate partner homicide in Maryland, the need is clear. Survivors, service providers, and law enforcement officers themselves have expressed an urgent need for specialized law enforcement training on the investigation of domestic violence crimes.

Additionally, law enforcement officers are presently required to provide information about a domestic violence service provider only on those calls where their presence is necessary to assist a survivor in retrieving belongings from a shared residence. The law does not mandate that the information provided be for a comprehensive domestic violence service provider. Comprehensive providers are those which provide the full range of services such as shelter, counseling, legal services, etc. as opposed to limited

services in a specific area of need. Non-comprehensive providers have an important role in serving survivors, but they do not typically have 24/7 office hours nor a physical shelter location. By ensuring survivors have a phone number that is answered 24/7, we can ensure that someone is available to help at the exact moment of the call.

Describe your proposed solution:

This bill would mandate that law enforcement officers receive specialized training on domestic violence in the police academy and biannually during in-service training. The training would address Maryland's laws related to domestic violence and best practices for investigations. It would emphasize the role of trauma as it impacts people of all ages and promote trauma-informed police practices, helping to avoid re-victimization when police respond to domestic violence calls.

This bill will also mandate that law enforcement officers provide, at minimum, the phone number to a local comprehensive domestic violence service provider on every domestic violence call. This bill will additionally require that sexual assault survivors receive information about a local comprehensive sexual assault crisis center on every call.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Although communities of color experience high rates of domestic violence and sexual assault victimization, survivors from these communities sometimes are discouraged from calling law enforcement, even in potentially lethal situations. It should be noted that survivors do not always have control over whether police respond. If a survivor does not call, a third party such as a bystander or neighbor might do so. Survivors of color may distrust law enforcement at baseline due to systemic racism, so it is that much more important for officers to build trust with survivors of color when there is a call for assistance. An officer who responds to a survivor in a trauma-informed way will be much more successful in building that trust than an officer who has no experience or training on how to respond. Building this trust is a long-term endeavor beyond the scope of legislative action alone, but it begins with equipping officers with the tools they need.

Survivors from communities of color will also benefit from being connected to comprehensive domestic violence and sexual assault service providers. These providers have the most resources available and often have connections to culturally specific non-comprehensive providers. Due to historic disinvestment in communities of color, survivors of color may have fewer resources available to rebuild their lives after domestic violence or sexual assault. Connecting them with comprehensive service providers is one way to support them.

Family Law - Protective Orders - Financial Relief

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill will bring Maryland in line with 20 other states that allow for the recovery of damages in a Final Protective Order, providing an avenue for economic justice for survivors.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Karen Simpson

Lead Group: Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence

Lead Group Contact: Jennifer A. Mercer, Public Policy Director **Email**: jmercer@mnadv.org

Describe the problem:
Survivors of intimate partner violence face numerous barriers to rebuilding their lives after experiencing abuse. One of the most significant and immediate barriers to safety is a lack of financial resources to address the numerous bills a survivor may have because of the abuse. These can include medical bills, relocation costs, and the costs associated with replacing property damaged by an abuser (such as a cell phone). For many survivors, these costs are incurred against a larger backdrop of ongoing financial abuse, making it difficult for them to rebuild their lives.

Existing avenues for financial relief after abuse are limited. Current statute allows a judge in a Final Protective Order to award Emergency Family Maintenance to survivors who are married to, or share a child in common with, the abuser. Survivors who do not meet either of these criteria are categorically ineligible. EFM is often difficult for eligible survivors to obtain, given the difficulty inherent in proving how much money an abuser makes when abusers routinely withhold financial information from survivors. A brief perusal of the Maryland Judiciary's Data Dashboard indicates that about 5% of Final Protective Orders granted in any given month in 2026 include an award of EFM.

For those survivors whose cases involve criminal charges, there may be some hope of an award of restitution in the criminal case, or a payment from the Maryland Crime Victims Compensation Fund. These pathways take months at best to come to fruition and are not available to the many survivors whose cases are never prosecuted. Or a survivor may choose to pursue damages in small claims, which requires a separate court action that can be re-traumatizing and is likely to be set for hearing later than a Final Protective Order would be.

Describe your proposed solution:
This bill would empower judges in Final Protective Order proceedings to award monetary relief to survivors for losses actually incurred as a direct result of the abuse. These would include medical bills, replacement/repair of damaged property, costs for food and shelter/relocation, and transportation

costs. By awarding these costs to the survivor as part of a Final Protective Order, a judge can order a more immediate remedy.

The timeliness of this relief is a significant benefit to survivors over currently existing legal options. Survivors and their children have immediate needs in the aftermath of abuse that cannot wait months for resolution of a civil or criminal case. Unlike small claims, the award will not require a separate hearing from the FPO for which the survivor must arrange transportation and coverage for work or dependent care so they can recount their trauma in open court, likely as the only person there who must speak about surviving IPV. Importantly, unlike the Crime Victims Compensation Fund, the award will be at the direct expense of the perpetrator, not taxpayers. Maryland has the opportunity to join 20 other states whose laws hold perpetrators financially accountable for the damages they cause.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

People of color face higher rates of intimate partner violence victimization, economic abuse, and discrimination in educational and employment settings. All of these are magnified for women of color, especially Black women. The combined effects of misogyny and racism combine to disadvantage the economic recovery of women of color after abuse. While we cannot legislate our way out of these problems, we can make a difference for survivors of color by empowering courts to respond to some of their most immediate needs. This is of particular importance to the most marginalized survivors, who are less likely to have alternative means of financial recovery.

211 Privacy Protections

One Sentence Synopsis: This legislation would protect the personal information of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking survivors who seek assistance through Maryland's 211 system and other state-funded referral services by restricting voluntary disclosures for civil immigration enforcement, strengthening confidentiality requirements, and establishing clear standards for informed consent and data privacy.

Committees: To Be Determined

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Lesley Lopez

Lead Group: TBD

Lead Group Contact: Emily Charlap, Chief of Staff **Email**: Lesley.Lopez@house.maryland.gov

Describe the problem:
Survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking must be able to seek help without fearing that their personal information could be shared with immigration enforcement authorities. For immigrant women and women living in mixed-status households, uncertainty about how government-funded service providers collect, retain, and share personal information can create a significant barrier to seeking assistance.

Maryland's 211 information and referral system connects residents with critical resources, including domestic violence services, emergency housing, food assistance, behavioral health care, and trafficking survivor support. Individuals seeking these services may disclose sensitive information about their identity, location, family circumstances, safety concerns, and experiences of abuse.

A preliminary review of 211 Maryland's published privacy policy identified broad provisions permitting information sharing with law enforcement, government agencies, and the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center (MCAC), which coordinates with state and federal public safety agencies. These policies raise concerns about whether information collected from vulnerable individuals could become accessible to federal immigration authorities.

While there is currently no verified evidence that 211 Maryland has directly reported domestic violence or trafficking survivors to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), existing policies do not expressly prohibit the voluntary disclosure of personally identifiable survivor information for civil immigration enforcement purposes, and the extent of existing confidentiality safeguards remains unclear.

This uncertainty is especially concerning for survivors whose immigration status, or that of a family member, may be used by an abuser as a tool of intimidation and control. Fear of detention, deportation, or family separation can discourage survivors from reporting abuse, seeking shelter, accessing health care, or connecting with legal assistance.

Maryland has enacted measures intended to protect personal information and limit certain forms of cooperation with federal immigration enforcement. However, existing protections may not comprehensively address information collected by nonprofit organizations and contractors administering state-funded human services programs, or information that may be shared indirectly through public safety information-sharing systems.

Women experiencing abuse should not have to choose between seeking safety and protecting themselves or their families from potential immigration consequences.

Maryland needs clear, consistent confidentiality standards so that individuals seeking assistance through state-funded referral services can do so with confidence that their sensitive personal information will be appropriately protected.

Describe your proposed solution:

The proposed legislation would establish clear confidentiality and data privacy requirements for Maryland's 211 information and referral system and other state-funded human services referral programs, with particular protections for individuals seeking assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking.

The legislation would address potential gaps in existing privacy protections by ensuring that sensitive information provided for the purpose of obtaining safety, support, or essential services is not voluntarily disclosed for unrelated civil immigration enforcement purposes.

The proposed legislation would:

- Prohibit voluntary disclosures for civil immigration enforcement. Restrict state-funded information and referral programs from voluntarily sharing personally identifiable information concerning domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or trafficking survivors for civil immigration enforcement purposes, subject to applicable federal law and legally required disclosures.

- Require informed consent for information sharing. Establish affirmative, informed consent requirements before disclosing personally identifiable survivor information to law enforcement, except when disclosure is required by law or necessary to address an imminent threat to safety.
- Strengthen data privacy and security standards. Establish minimum requirements governing the collection, retention, access, and disclosure of sensitive information obtained through telephone calls, text messages, online platforms, and other referral services. These protections would help ensure that programs collect and retain only information necessary to provide services and fulfill legal obligations.
- Establish transparency and accountability. Require covered programs to document requests for survivor information from law enforcement and other government agencies and provide periodic aggregate reporting on such requests and disclosures without identifying individual survivors.
- Extend protections to state-funded contractors and nonprofit providers. Ensure that confidentiality standards apply not only to state agencies but also to nonprofit organizations and contractors administering state-funded information and referral programs.

The legislation would preserve existing mandatory reporting obligations, valid legal process, public safety exceptions, and applicable federal requirements. It would also be designed to complement

existing Maryland and federal victim confidentiality protections rather than interfere with legitimate survivor assistance or criminal investigations.

For women experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or trafficking, these protections would reduce uncertainty about whether seeking assistance could expose them or their families to immigration enforcement. Clear confidentiality requirements would help strengthen trust in service providers and encourage survivors to access emergency shelter, health care, legal assistance, and other critical resources.

The legislation would also provide greater consistency for service providers by establishing clear standards for consent, information sharing, and the handling of sensitive records.

Ultimately, the proposal would reinforce a fundamental principle: individuals seeking protection from abuse and exploitation should be able to access essential services without unnecessary exposure of their private information to immigration enforcement authorities.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

The legislation would particularly benefit immigrant communities, communities of color, and mixed-status families by reducing barriers to accessing domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and other essential human services.

Immigrant women and women of color may experience overlapping barriers to seeking assistance, including language access challenges, economic insecurity, discrimination, limited familiarity with available services, and concerns about interactions with government agencies.

For undocumented individuals and mixed-status families, the possibility that personal information provided to a government-funded service program could become accessible to immigration enforcement authorities may create additional fear and uncertainty. Abusive partners and traffickers may exploit these concerns by threatening to report victims or their family members to immigration authorities if they seek help or attempt to leave an abusive situation.

These threats can discourage survivors from contacting domestic violence hotlines, seeking emergency housing, reporting trafficking, obtaining legal assistance, or accessing health and behavioral health services.

The proposed legislation would address these barriers by establishing clear restrictions on voluntary disclosure of survivor information for civil immigration enforcement purposes and requiring informed consent for other law enforcement disclosures, subject to legally required exceptions.

These protections would help ensure that individuals can seek assistance regardless of immigration status or the immigration status of family members, while reducing the risk that sensitive information provided in a moment of crisis could be used for an unrelated enforcement purpose.

The legislation would also promote greater consistency and transparency in how state-funded service providers handle personal information. Extending confidentiality requirements to nonprofit organizations and contractors would help close potential gaps between protections applicable to government agencies and those applicable to organizations delivering publicly funded services.

By strengthening trust in Maryland's human services referral systems, the proposal would help immigrant women, survivors of color, and mixed-status families access critical resources needed to escape abuse, protect their families, and achieve greater safety and stability.

The legislation would advance Maryland's commitment to equitable access to services by ensuring that confidentiality protections are clear, consistent, and meaningful for vulnerable individuals seeking assistance.

The Coerced Debt – Debtor Protections Act

One Sentence Synopsis: The Coerced Debt – Debtor Protections Act would establish legal protections for Marylanders forced or manipulated into debt through abuse or exploitation, allowing survivors to challenge coerced financial obligations, stop collection efforts, correct damaged credit records, and pursue legal remedies to restore their financial independence.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Jeff Waldstreicher

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Lesley Lopez

Lead Group: Economic Action Maryland/Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence

Lead Group Contact: Jennifer Mercer/Marceline White **Email**: Lesley.Lopez@house.maryland.gov

Describe the problem:
Coerced debt is a widespread but often overlooked form of economic abuse in which an individual is forced, manipulated, threatened, or deceived into taking on financial obligations against their will. This abuse frequently occurs in relationships involving domestic violence, where an abusive partner uses debt and damaged credit to maintain financial control and prevent a survivor from achieving independence.

Women are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence and the economic abuse that often accompanies it. Abusers may force survivors to open credit cards, take out loans, sign leases, co-sign financial agreements, or assume debts that primarily benefit the abuser. In other cases, abusers use a survivor's personal identifying information to open accounts without their knowledge or consent. Research compiled by the Center for Survivor Agency and Justice indicates that nearly half of domestic violence survivors experience coerced debt. Additionally, 46% of survivors report that their credit history or credit score was harmed by actions taken by an abusive partner.

The consequences can persist long after an abusive relationship ends. Survivors may be left responsible for thousands of dollars in debt they never freely agreed to incur. Damaged credit can prevent them from securing safe housing, obtaining transportation, accessing utilities, or achieving financial stability. These barriers can make it harder to leave an abusive relationship and can prolong financial dependence on an abuser.

Existing consumer protection and credit reporting systems do not adequately account for the circumstances of coercion. A debt may appear legally valid even when it resulted from threats, intimidation, manipulation, or exploitation. Survivors often face significant obstacles when attempting to dispute these obligations, particularly when creditors require documentation that may be difficult or unsafe to obtain.

Although domestic violence survivors are among those most directly affected, coerced debt also harms other vulnerable populations, including young people in foster care whose identities are misused and older adults subjected to financial exploitation.

Without a clear legal process to recognize and remedy coerced debt, survivors can remain trapped in financial hardship caused by someone else's abuse. Maryland law should provide a meaningful pathway for individuals to challenge these debts and rebuild their economic security.

Describe your proposed solution:
The Coerced Debt – Debtor Protections Act would establish a comprehensive civil legal framework to protect Marylanders who incur debt through fraud, threats, intimidation, manipulation, coercion, or the unauthorized use of their personal identifying information.

Building on HB 1198, introduced during the 2026 legislative session, the legislation would provide survivors of domestic violence and other forms of financial exploitation with a process to dispute coerced debts, stop collection efforts, correct credit reporting records, and pursue legal remedies.

The proposed legislation would:
- Establish a process to dispute coerced debt. Allow individuals to notify creditors when a debt was incurred through coercion and provide supporting documentation. Importantly, survivors would be able to substantiate their claims through sworn statements from qualified professionals, including social workers, health care providers, mental health professionals, and domestic violence service providers, rather than being required to obtain a police report.

- Require creditor review and response. Establish procedures for creditors to acknowledge and assess if claims of coerced debt meet statutory requirements, notify credit reporting agencies that the debt is disputed, and determine whether collection activity should continue.

- Provide meaningful court remedies. Allow individuals to seek relief in Circuit Court when creditors continue collection efforts on disputed coerced debts. Courts could determine whether a debt resulted from coercion, order appropriate relief from collection, and require creditors to request the removal of inaccurate or coerced debt information from consumer credit reports.

- Protect survivors' privacy and safety. Authorize courts to seal records or redact identifying information when necessary to protect survivors and their families from retaliation or additional harm.

- Establish accountability for perpetrators. Preserve the right of survivors to pursue damages against the individuals responsible for coercing the debt, including recovery of financial losses, attorney's fees, and court costs. Creditors would also retain the ability to seek recovery from the responsible perpetrator.
- Protect individuals in debt collection proceedings. Establish coerced debt as an affirmative defense when a creditor brings a collection action and prohibit agreements that waive the protections established under the law.

The legislation would apply to qualifying debts arising from domestic abuse, financial exploitation, trafficking, and exploitation of children in out-of-home placements. It would preserve protections for debts secured by personal property, including automobile loans, while excluding debts secured by real property.

The 2027 legislation would also build on discussions with financial institutions and the Judiciary during the 2026 session to clarify procedures and make the protections administratively workable without creating unnecessary barriers for survivors.

For women experiencing domestic violence, the bill would address one of the most significant obstacles to leaving abusive relationships and rebuilding independent lives: financial obligations created through coercion. By providing legal tools to challenge those debts and repair damaged credit, the legislation would help survivors secure housing, maintain employment, access transportation, and establish long-term economic stability.

The bill recognizes that financial abuse can continue long after other forms of abuse have ended and that meaningful protection requires addressing the lasting financial consequences of exploitation.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

The Coerced Debt – Debtor Protections Act would benefit communities of color by addressing financial abuse and exploitation that can compound existing racial and economic inequities, particularly for women of color, low-income survivors of domestic violence, and young people transitioning out of foster care.

Coerced debt can have especially severe consequences for individuals who already face barriers to financial stability, including limited savings, unequal access to credit, housing discrimination, and lower levels of accumulated wealth. For survivors living paycheck to paycheck, even a relatively small debt incurred through coercion can have lasting consequences for housing, transportation, employment, and financial independence.

Women of color experiencing domestic violence may face overlapping barriers related to economic inequality, discrimination, and access to legal assistance. When an abusive partner forces a survivor to assume debt or damages their credit, the resulting financial harm can make it substantially more difficult to leave the relationship, secure independent housing, or rebuild financial security.

The legislation would also benefit young people who have experienced foster care, including youth of color who are disproportionately represented in parts of the child welfare system. Foster youth may be especially vulnerable to identity theft and financial exploitation because multiple adults and institutions have access to their personal identifying information. Some young adults discover fraudulent debts only when they attempt to obtain housing, employment, or credit after leaving foster care.

Older adults in communities of color may also experience financial exploitation involving family members, caregivers, or other trusted individuals. Coerced financial obligations can be particularly harmful to seniors living on fixed incomes or relying on limited retirement savings.

By establishing a clear process for challenging coerced debt, the legislation would help address these harms through several protections to help reduce the long-term economic consequences of abuse and provide individuals with greater opportunities to obtain stable housing, maintain employment, and rebuild financial independence.

By addressing coerced debt as a form of economic abuse, the legislation would contribute to Maryland's broader efforts to reduce financial inequities and improve economic security for historically marginalized communities.

The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act

One Sentence Synopsis: The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act would protect individuals from criminal investigation, prosecution, and civil liability based on their pregnancy or pregnancy outcome, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and self-managed abortion, while establishing safeguards for medical privacy, lawful health care, and reproductive autonomy.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Lesley Lopez

Lead Group: Pregnancy Justice

Lead Group Contact: Email: Lesley.Lopez@house.maryland.gov

Describe the problem:
Across the United States, people experiencing miscarriage, stillbirth, self-managed abortion, and other pregnancy outcomes have faced criminal investigations and prosecutions based on the circumstances of their pregnancies. Following the Supreme Court's decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, concerns about pregnancy-related criminalization have intensified, particularly for individuals experiencing pregnancy complications or seeking reproductive health care outside traditional medical settings.

Pregnancy-related criminalization can turn deeply personal medical experiences into matters of criminal investigation. Individuals may face scrutiny of their medical decisions, pregnancy histories, internet searches, and private health information, even when there is no independently established evidence of criminal conduct. The possibility of investigation can discourage patients from seeking timely medical attention, undermine trust between patients and health care providers, and compound the trauma associated with pregnancy loss.

Maryland is not immune to these concerns. The prosecution of Moira Akers following a reported stillbirth illustrates how pregnancy outcomes can become the subject of criminal proceedings and how an individual's reproductive decisions and medical history may be scrutinized in determining criminal liability. The case also raised significant concerns about the reliability and interpretation of forensic evidence used in pregnancy-related prosecutions.

These issues disproportionately affect women who already face barriers to reproductive health care, particularly low-income women, women of color, and individuals with limited access to prenatal and maternal health services. Fear of criminal investigation may be especially harmful to those who

experience pregnancy complications outside a hospital or who face financial, geographic, or systemic barriers to care.

In 2024, Maryland voters approved a constitutional amendment recognizing reproductive freedom as a fundamental right. However, explicit statutory protections are still needed to clarify that pregnancy, labor, delivery, pregnancy loss, or a reported pregnancy outcome cannot, by themselves, serve as the basis for criminalizing the individual experiencing them.

The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act seeks to address this gap by establishing clear legal protections against pregnancy-related criminalization while preserving appropriate investigations of criminal conduct committed by others.

Describe your proposed solution:

The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act would establish comprehensive statutory protections to prevent individuals from being investigated, prosecuted, searched, or subjected to civil liability based solely on their pregnancy, labor, delivery, pregnancy loss, or reported pregnancy outcome.

Building on HB 1131, introduced during the 2026 legislative session, the revised legislation would clarify the scope of these protections and establish consistent standards for law enforcement, courts, health care providers, and government agencies.

The proposed legislation would:

- Protect individuals from pregnancy-related criminalization. Prohibit criminal prosecution, investigation, and civil liability based solely on an individual's pregnancy or pregnancy outcome, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and self-managed abortion. These protections would not depend on whether law enforcement agrees with the individual's account of the pregnancy outcome.

- Establish clear investigative safeguards. Prohibit the use of an individual's pregnancy, labor, delivery, pregnancy loss, or reported pregnancy outcome as the basis for establishing probable cause for a search warrant directed at that individual. The legislation would preserve investigations of independently supported criminal conduct by another person, including assault, abuse, coercion, or violence that caused or contributed to a pregnancy loss.

- Protect medical privacy while preserving required reporting. Prevent pregnancy-related medical information from becoming an independent basis for criminal investigation of the person experiencing the pregnancy outcome. The legislation would preserve existing public-health reporting, maternal and fetal mortality review, and legally required disclosures concerning abuse or other criminal conduct.

- Protect lawful medical care and providers. Clarify that health care providers acting within their scope of practice and in accordance with accepted medical standards may provide care to individuals experiencing or recovering from pregnancy loss without being penalized merely for providing that care. The legislation would preserve accountability for malpractice, abuse, coercion, and other independently unlawful conduct.

- Establish meaningful enforcement and remedies. Retain penalties for knowing and willful violations and strengthen the ability of affected individuals to seek legal remedies, including appropriate damages, court orders, and attorney's fees.

The legislation would give practical effect to Maryland's constitutional guarantee of reproductive freedom by establishing clear protections against criminalization based on pregnancy outcomes. For women, these protections would reduce the threat of punitive investigations following pregnancy complications or loss, strengthen patient-provider trust, and support access to timely medical care. The legislation would also clarify the responsibilities of law enforcement and health care professionals while preserving the State's ability to investigate crimes committed against pregnant individuals. Ultimately, the bill recognizes that experiencing a pregnancy outcome should not, by itself, expose a person to criminal investigation or punishment.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

The Maryland Reproductive Justice and Pregnancy Outcome Protection Act would particularly benefit Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other historically marginalized communities that experience disproportionate barriers to maternal health care and heightened vulnerability to pregnancy-related criminalization.

Racial disparities in maternal health remain a significant concern in Maryland and nationally. Black women experience substantially higher rates of pregnancy-related mortality and serious maternal health complications than white women, reflecting persistent inequities in health care access, treatment, and outcomes.

Pregnancy-related criminalization can compound these disparities. Individuals who face barriers to prenatal care, experience pregnancy complications outside traditional medical settings, or lack access to consistent health services may face additional scrutiny concerning their reproductive decisions. The use of medical histories, pregnancy-related behavior, or disputed forensic evidence in criminal investigations raises particular concerns for communities already affected by unequal treatment within health care and criminal justice systems.

Low-income women and women of color may also have fewer resources to obtain legal representation, navigate criminal investigations, or protect their medical privacy. The financial and emotional consequences of an investigation or prosecution can be devastating, even when charges are ultimately dismissed or a conviction is overturned.

The legislation would address these inequities by establishing consistent protections against pregnancy-related criminalization regardless of an individual's race, income, access to medical care, or circumstances surrounding a pregnancy outcome.

By preventing pregnancy outcomes from independently serving as the basis for criminal investigation or prosecution, the bill would help reduce unnecessary surveillance and legal exposure for individuals experiencing pregnancy complications or loss.

The legislation would also support greater trust in medical providers by clarifying that seeking treatment for miscarriage, stillbirth, or other pregnancy-related conditions should not, by itself, expose patients to criminal investigation. Preserving legally required public-health reporting and mortality reviews would allow Maryland to continue collecting information necessary to understand and address maternal health disparities.

By strengthening reproductive autonomy, medical privacy, and protections against pregnancy-related criminalization, the Act would advance Maryland's efforts to address racial inequities in maternal health and the criminal justice system while giving effect to the State's constitutional commitment to reproductive freedom.

Health Insurance - Ovarian Cancer Prevention With Salpingectomy - Required Coverage and Prohibited Cost Sharing

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill will expand insurance coverage for salpingectomies performed for ovarian cancer risk reduction, including cases in which a patient requests the procedure for preventive purposes rather than in response to an immediate medical emergency.

Committees: House Health and Government Operations

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Terri Hill

Lead Group: Maryland ACOG American college of obstetricians and gynecologists

Lead Group Contact: Christine Krone, Government Relations Specialist **Email**: CKrone@SMWPA.com

Describe the problem:
Ovarian cancer is one of the deadliest forms of gynecological cancer, in part because it is often diagnosed at an advanced stage when treatment becomes more difficult. Research has found that many cases of high-grade serous ovarian cancer, the most common and deadly type, may originate in the fallopian tubes. For individuals at increased risk of ovarian cancer, removing the fallopian tubes through a procedure called a salpingectomy may significantly reduce their risk of developing the disease. However, access to preventive procedures can be limited by insurance coverage requirements, physician recommendations, and the cost of out-of-pocket medical expenses. These barriers can prevent women from making informed decisions about their reproductive health and taking proactive steps to protect themselves against cancer. In Maryland alone, more than 270 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer, demonstrating the need for greater access to preventive care. This bill seeks to address these barriers by expanding access to insurance-covered salpingectomies, allowing more women to make decisions about their health and potentially reducing the burden of ovarian cancer across the state.

Describe your proposed solution:
Currently, Maryland insurance policies may cover medically necessary, non-elective salpingectomies, but coverage for elective procedures intended to reduce future cancer risk may be more limited. This bill would expand insurance coverage for salpingectomies performed for ovarian cancer risk reduction, including cases in which a patient requests the procedure for preventive purposes rather than in response to an immediate medical emergency. By reducing financial barriers and limiting the need for a physician's approval as a prerequisite for insurance coverage, the legislation would give women greater autonomy over decisions concerning their reproductive health. It would also promote preventive healthcare by making a potentially life-saving risk-reduction option more accessible to individuals who wish to pursue it. Ultimately, this bill aims to reduce disparities in access to preventive gynecological

care, empower women to make informed choices about their bodies, and potentially reduce the number of ovarian cancer cases and related deaths in Maryland.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

From the NIH, many Black and Hispanic patients are more frequently given a standard tubal ligation also known as “tying the tubes”. For instance, data shows that during cesarean deliveries, Black patients are nearly 50% less likely to receive a salpingectomy than White patients. To reiterate, salpingectomies are not only a pregnancy prevention method, but an ovarian cancer prevention method. The lack of salpingectomies performed on women of color represents an inequity in preventative care as they are missing out on added ovarian cancer protection. Hysterectomies are an alternate procedure that involves the full removal of the uterus, partially keeps the cervix and radically removes the surrounding tissue. This procedure happens most to wealthy white individuals as it is a preventative measure but it is much harder and dangerous recovery. The salpingectomy on the other hand is faster and serves the same purpose, however adoption has not been equitable across racial groups. From the NIH, Non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic other race women are less likely to undergo opportunistic salpingectomy than non-Hispanic White women even after adjusting for sociodemographic, clinical, procedural, hospital, and provider characteristics. These differences persisted after the release of national guidelines supporting opportunistic salpingectomy use. Having it available and covered by insurance will capture this percentage of people who don’t receive it.

Menstrual Product Access Bill

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill will expand menstrual product access across the state of Maryland in public buildings.

Committees: House Health and Government Operations

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Terri Hill

Lead Group: Women's Giving Circle

Lead Group Contact: Paula Seabright, Philanthropic Chair **Email**: paulaseabright@comcast.net

Describe the problem:
The bill attempts to address period poverty and the lack of proper access to menstrual products of women across the state of Maryland. Oftentimes, when women need a period product unexpectedly or forgot to bring a product with them, they are left to use unsanitary methods or put a pause to their day to find a solution. This bill works to minimize these behaviors by offering access.

Describe your proposed solution:
This bill will ensure that public buildings across the state of Maryland offer menstrual products for free in restrooms across their buildings. This will ensure that anyone who needs a menstrual product at any time can access one when needed and promote expanded menstrual product access across the state of Maryland.

Benefit to Communities of Color:
Local data shows that Black and Hispanic/Latino communities disproportionately experience period poverty, and 35% of individuals who menstruate experience period poverty in Baltimore, Maryland, a predominantly black city in Maryland. This bill would expand access and ensure that this public health concern is addressed.

2027 Save Maryland Health Care Act

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill would increase Maryland's alcohol excise tax by 10 cents per drink, which would reduce alcohol-caused illnesses and premature deaths while generating approximately $220 million per year to invest in programs to help hundreds of thousands of Marylanders keep their health coverage and improve health equity in the wake of federal attacks.

Committees: Senate Budget and Taxation, House Ways and Means

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Cheryl Pasteur

Lead Group: Maryland Health Care for All Coalition

Lead Group Contact: Stephanie Klapper, Director of Policy and Advocacy **Email**: stephanie@healthcareforall.com

Describe the problem:
The State has made great progress reducing the number of Marylanders without health coverage and improving health equity. However, because of actions by the federal government including HR 1 and termination of enhanced federal tax credits, tens of thousands of Marylanders have lost health care coverage since early 2025 and hundreds of thousands more could lose coverage in the coming years. These reductions in health coverage threaten to increase uncompensated care, increasing health insurance premiums and making health care less affordable for everyone. This is particularly relevant to women, who are already more likely than men to report delays in health care access, inability to see a doctor due to high cost, and cost-related medication non-adherence. Moreover, in younger women and in Black women, these disparities are exacerbated.

Against this background, health inequities in health outcomes continue to persist. For example, Black mothers experience pregnancy-related mortality rates three to four times higher than white mothers, a gap that continues to broaden over time. Additionally, infant mortality for Black non-Hispanic infants is 2.5 times that of White non-Hispanic infants, with particularly high vulnerability in rural communities. Disparities also manifest in low birth weight and prenatal care, with Black and Latino mothers twice as likely as white mothers to receive late or no prenatal care.

Meanwhile, women are particularly impacted by the negative effects of alcohol consumption, as shown in a 2024 CDC study, which found a staggering 35% increase in alcohol-related deaths in women between 2016 and 2021, with potential contributors including changing social norms, marketing targeted toward women, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, alcohol consumption is involved in 50% of sexual assault cases; in the U.S., 11% of women have experienced completed alcohol- or drug-facilitated rape, though research suggests that the prevalence of sexual assault can be lowered by reductions to alcohol consumption. Alcohol consumption leads to approximately 2,884 deaths per year

in Maryland. Compared to men, women who drink are at an increased risk of developing life-threatening alcohol-related health conditions, including liver disease, heart disease, and cancer. Women are also less likely to get treated for alcohol use disorder, and over the past 20 years, there have been greater increases in alcohol-related emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and deaths for women than for men.

Describe your proposed solution:

A dime a drink increase to the alcohol excise tax would decrease alcohol consumption and generate approximately $220 million to protect health care coverage and Health Equity Resource Communities, all of which will significantly benefit women, including:

$190 million/year to protect the State Subsidy Program: In response to Congress terminating enhanced federal tax credits, Maryland created the State Subsidy Program which includes the Young Adult Subsidy (MLAW successfully advocated for the Young Adult Subsidy Program in 2025) and fully or partially replaces the enhanced federal tax credit for Marylanders under 400% of the federal poverty level. The majority of Marylanders receiving the subsidy are women. As of September 2026, the State Subsidy Program helped 85,157 women afford their health coverage compared to 62,370 men. However, the program only has funding through 2027. Funding from this legislation would prevent 31,000 people from losing coverage and protect many more from having to downgrade to lower quality coverage with higher deductibles and co-pays.

$15 million/year to invest in Medicaid eligibility operations: New Medicaid work reporting requirements also present a dire threat to women. Women make up over half of adult Medicaid enrollees and bear a disproportionate share of caregiving and family responsibilities. Women make up the majority of workers in low-wage, part-time, and service sectors with fluctuating hours. These factors make women especially vulnerable to requirements to consistently meet rigid monthly hour thresholds (such as 80 hours per month) and to navigate complex, recurring reporting rules. This legislation would allow Maryland to invest more into eligibility operations such as IT or navigators in order to prevent Marylanders from unnecessarily losing their coverage under the new federal work reporting requirements.

$15 million/year to Fund Health Equity Resource Communities: The Health Equity Resource Act which MLAW successfully advocated for in 2021 will lose funding after mid-2029 with no state action. The Health Equity Resource Communities programs have been reducing health disparities and improving health outcomes around the state, including projects that focus specifically on providing care to Black and Latina women experiencing homelessness, reducing maternal and infant health disparities, and supporting women returning from incarceration.

The policy would also decrease alcohol consumption by 2.7% on average, which would in turn decrease the harmful effects of alcohol consumption that disproportionately impact women.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Health care coverage expansion under the Affordable Care Act and Maryland implementation reduced disparities by race and ethnicity in Maryland. Revenue raised by this legislation will help protect this progress from federal attacks by investing in the State Subsidy Program and Medicaid eligibility operations so that people do not lose their health coverage. In addition, Health Equity Resource Communities will be able to continue addressing longstanding health disparities by race, ethnicity, disability, and geography. In their first two years alone, HERC programs have connected over 2,100 individuals to primary care providers, completed 8,200 referrals for essential needs like housing and food security, and expanded access by opening or upgrading 43 care sites. Finally, in the U.S.,

communities of color are disproportionately impacted by alcohol-related deaths. By increasing Maryland's alcohol excise tax, we can decrease alcohol consumption and thus the disproportionate harm it causes to women and communities of color.

2027 Prescription Drug Affordability Act

One Sentence Synopsis: The bill would allow Maryland's first-in-the-nation Prescription Drug Affordability Board to quickly and easily set upper payment limits for drug costs that match the Maximum Fair Price for drugs negotiated by Medicare, eliminating time-consuming redundant cost reviews and saving Marylanders and our state hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

Committees: Senate Finance, House Health

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Dawn Gile

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Jennifer White Holland

Lead Group: Maryland Health Care for All Coalition

Lead Group Contact: Stephanie Klapper, Director of Policy and Advocacy **Email**: stephanie@healthcareforall.com

Describe the problem:
Drugs don't work if people can't afford them, with polling showing that 1 in 3 Marylanders ration their medication or skip doses due to prohibitive costs. Unaffordable prescription drugs also place immense strain on the health care system as a whole by driving up health insurance premiums, burdening state and local government budgets, and contributing to avoidable health care spending caused by non-adherence.

Women face a higher cost burden. Persistent gender pay gaps and social inequities leave women struggling to afford essential health care and prescription medications, even though they are more likely to rely on prescription drugs than men. Polling consistently highlights that women are more prone to skipping or rationing doses due to cost, directly leading to worse health outcomes. Because women head the vast majority of single-parent households, they frequently bear the full responsibility for securing their children's medications. In Maryland, roughly 26% of female-headed households live in poverty, making high prescription drug costs a direct threat to family health and financial security. Additionally, several highly expensive medications target conditions that disproportionately affect women—such as Ibrance which treats breast cancer, Enbrel which treats rheumatoid arthritis (2 to 3 times more common in women than men), Linzess which treats irritable bowel syndrome (1.5 to 2 times more common in women, and Breo Ellipta and Trelegy Ellipta which treats adult asthma (1.5 times higher in women). Herceptin, a vital breast cancer treatment was approved in 1985, but Herceptin's manufacturers have leveraged patent system loopholes to preserve market exclusivity through 2033, keeping annual treatment costs above $60,000.

Describe your proposed solution:
The legislation would allow Maryland's first-in-the-nation Prescription Drug Affordability Board (PDAB) to quickly and easily set Upper Payment Limits (UPLs) for drug costs that match the Maximum Fair Price

(MFP) for drugs negotiated by Medicare. So far Medicare has negotiated MFPs for 25 drugs, including Embrel, Linzess, and Breo Ellipta and Trelegy Elipta which treat conditions that disproportionately harm women. The legislation would eliminate the need for the PDAB to conduct many time-consuming and redundant cost reviews and save Marylanders and our state hundreds of millions of dollars every year. It would also allow the PDAB to turn its attention to conducting cost reviews on high-cost drugs that Medicare enrollees do not frequently use.

This legislation would build on MLAW's past successful advocacy to create the PDAB and expand its ability to set Upper Payment Limits for high-cost drugs beyond state and local governments to ALL Marylanders. So far the PDAB has taken action to set UPLs on Ozempic (type 2 diabetes/heart disease) and Jardiance (type 2 diabetes, heart failure, and chronic kidney disease), and we hope the PDAB will set UPLs for these two drugs for all Marylanders by 2028. The PDAB is doing great work, but cost reviews take a lot of time. This legislation would dramatically increase the PDAB's efficiency by leveraging the Medicare MFP work that the federal government is already doing and allow Maryland's PDAB to devote more of their time and resources to review expensive drugs that Medicare is less likely to review, like those used by children and women younger than 65 years of age.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Inequities in access to prescription drugs are compounded for women of color, who have even greater wage and wealth gaps due to systemic racism. Even more notably, there are massive disparities in health care/outcomes for people of color. Social, political, and economic conditions result in Black Americans being more likely to suffer from chronic conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes, both of which require expensive prescription medications. The Latino population has the highest uninsured rates in the state/country, which can make health care and prescription drugs out of reach. Black and Latino adults aged 65 and older can be twice as likely to report difficulty affording their prescriptions than their White counterparts.

Several of the drugs that have Medicare MFPs treat conditions which cause disproportionate harm in communities of color, including diabetes and heart and vascular conditions. This legislation would allow the PDAB to quickly set UPLs for these and the rest of the 25 drugs.

As long as prescription drug manufacturers are allowed to charge whatever they deem the market can bear, those with the fewest economic resources in our country will shoulder the heaviest burden. While the pharmaceutical industry claims that the high cost of medications is due to research and development, many diseases that disproportionately affect Black communities are under researched and adequate treatment lags behind. Sickle cell disease has limited treatment options on the market, and those that are available are incredibly costly. If this legislation passes and the PDAB can leverage Medicare MFPs to set UPLs, Maryland's PDAB would be freed up to review high-cost drugs that Medicare is not currently negotiating.

Missing and Murdered American Indian and Alaskan Native Women and Girls – Day of Awareness and Reporting Requirement

One Sentence Synopsis: The bill allocates May 5th as a day of Remembrance for Murdered and Lost Indigenous Women and Girls and also requires local law enforcement agencies to sufficiently collect data on violence against American Indian and Alaskan Native women in the state.

Committees: To Be Determined

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Terri Hill

Lead Group: Capital Native Nations

Lead Group Contact: Ani Blackhorse Begay **Email**: ani_begay@hotmail.com

Describe the problem:
The bill designates a day of Remembrance for Murdered and Lost Indigenous Women and Girls, and Indigenous peoples. The bill allocates May 5th as the aforementioned day and also requires local law enforcement agencies to sufficiently collect data on violence against American Indian and Alaskan Native women in the state and to make policy recommendations on improving data collection and coordination among law enforcement agencies.

Describe your proposed solution:
Indigenous Women are a group of people who are underrepresented in law enforcement and violence records because we are not giving them care. In many violent crimes, like murders and missing cases, Indigenous Women's identities are not being captured in the statistics that the law enforcement captures. Instead, these women are being misidentified as black or hispanic, not indigenous. This bill works to track data with these distinctions of the violence that they face and build policy solutions to prevent these violent behaviors from happening.

Benefit to Communities of Color:
The bill works directly to benefit communities of color, but specifically Indigenous people of color. According to the National Congress of American Indians and federal research, more than 84% of AI/AN women have experienced violence in their lifetime, however according to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Violent crimes against Indigenous women are frequently underreported, misclassified, or left unrecorded." This bill ensures that the women who have been underrepresented in the past are remembered and acknowledged so that indigenous communities know that their people and voices are impactful and important.

Felony Murder Repeal

One Sentence Synopsis: Repeal current felony murder law.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Crutchfield

Lead Group: OPD and MCDAA

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

Describe the problem:
The felony murder law drives Maryland's Mass Incarceration Crisis. Specifically, it drives extreme sentencing of the most vulnerable: youth, Black people, and women (including survivors of domestic violence and police violence). The felony murder law allows for individuals to be convicted of first degree murder -- which carries a mandatory life sentence -- if they participate in certain felonies that resulted in a death, even when they did not kill, did not intend to kill, or played a very limited role in the felony.

Describe your proposed solution:
Incarcerated women, commonly report histories of family or intimate partner violence.
Courts typically do not account for when those experiences influence their involvement in crime, Because felony murder laws impose identical sentences on individuals regardless of their role in the crime, they can produce especially unjust punishments for women whose criminalized acts are coerced by intimate partners.We do not have Maryland specific felony murder data, but California found that 72% of women but only 55% of men serving a life sentence for felony murder were not the perpetrators of the homicide. And, many of these women convicted of felony murder were accomplices navigating intimate partner violence at the time of the offense and were criminalized for acts of survival. In contrast, among their 411 male counterparts who were surveyed, only 55% had not committed the killing.

Benefit to Communities of Color:
Black people and other communities of color are disproportionately impacted by felony murder laws and are overrepresented among those convicted and imprisoned under these statutes. Again, we lack Maryland specific data, but in Pennsylvania in 2020, 80% of imprisoned individuals with a felony murder conviction were people of color and 70% were African American. Bias and inequities that exist both within and beyond the criminal legal system drive these racial disparities. Racial disparities in prosecutors' use of discretion—in decisions about which homicides to prosecute as felony murder and how many people to charge as co-defendants— directly disadvantages people of color.

Family Law - Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations ("Know Before They Knock" Family Right to Notice Act)

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill would require the Department of Social Services to provide parents a written notice of their rights at the initial contact with the Department of Social Services during a Child Protect Service Investigation

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Shaneka Henson

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 attempts to protect families' rights against unreasonable government search, seizure and intrusion into their homes, families and lives by informing them of their rights before they begin participating in an investigation where there has been allegation of neglect. This bill directly impacts women as women of color are disproportionately the parent that is being investigated or having contact with DSS.

Describe your proposed solution:
The proposed legislation would require the Department of Social Service to provide parents a notice of their rights before they begin questioning a parent. The notice will provide information to the parents informing them of already existing rights like: a parent does not have to allow DSS into their home; A parent has the right to know the allegations against them and they have the right to consult with an attorney, among other things.

Benefit to Communities of Color:
This legislation will benefit communities of color as families of color are disproportionately targeted and separated by the Department of Social Services.

End Wrongful Charging Practices

One Sentence Synopsis: In Maryland any individual can apply for criminal charges against someone by submitting an application for a statement of charges to a District Court Commissioner, despite the fact that this Commissioner cannot investigate the allegations they will issue charges and even an arrest warrant.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Jackie Addison

Lead Group: OPD, ACLU, Baltimore City SAO

Lead Group Contact: Yanet Amanuel, Public Policy Director of ACLU **Email**: amanuel@aclu-md.org

Describe the problem:
The District Court Commissioner lacks the ability to investigate the accuracy or honesty of the allegations put before them. Thus, the commissioners typically must limit their review of the application to the four corners of the document. As such, they essentially issue a rubber stamp on any allegations made, simply assuming the truth of what is alleged and issuing charges based on unverified, uncorroborated, and occasionally patently false allegations. Particularly problematic are situations in which someone accuses another of committing an act of violence, such as an assault. The accusation can be completely baseless, but if the allegations can be construed to create a belief that a defendant poses a danger to another or the community, the commissioner may issue an arrest warrant. As such, a simple unsupported allegation of an assault, or any violent crime, will often lead to the issuance of an arrest warrant for the accused. This commissioner charging system is abused most significantly by perpetrators of domestic violence. We often see that where a perpetrator of domestic violence is criminally charged, or believes that they may be, that they will go and apply for false charges of assault (or other crimes) to be taken out against the victim of their abuse, causing those survivors to be arrested. Perpetrators of domestic violence very often have more agency than their victims. They understand how to abuse the system and are willing to do so. Whether to retaliate against their partners for accusations made against them, or as a tool of coercive control, or to escape from their own prosecutions, utterly meritless accusations of domestic violence are commonly made by the perpetrators of it. This abuse of the commissioner charging system causes the unnecessary and unjust arrest of innocent, victimized, individuals.

Describe your proposed solution:
This bill will require that the State's Attorneys Office review allegations before the issuance of an arrest warrant or summons. The SAO can conduct investigation into the allegations and determine if they have any merit, accordingly wrongfully accused women will be protected from abuse use of the system.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Black and brown individuals from communities long denied equitable access to quality education, affordable healthcare, economic opportunity, and mental health services that can prevent involvement in the criminal legal system. Removing a charging practice that upends lives by an arrest based on false, non-viable charges will protect the Black and Brown individuals who are disproportionally represented in the criminal legal system. Moreover, individuals immigration system are currently at risk of being deported -- this has happened in numerous jurisdictions -- over false charges. Requiring SAO review over charges will help protect vulnerable Black and Brown Marylanders.

Criminal Procedure – Sentencing – Domestic Violence as a Mitigating Factor (PATH ACT – Providing Alternatives Through Healing for Justice Involved Individuals

One Sentence Synopsis: The 2027 PATH Act authorizes a defendant to introduce evidence that they were previously a victim of domestic violence, and that domestic violence was a significant contributing factor to the commission of the crime for which the defendant was convicted.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Shaneka Henson

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Kym Taylor

Lead Group: Helping Ourselves to Transform (HOTT)

Lead Group Contact: Dr. Carmon Johnson, President, Helping Ourselves to Transform (HOTT) **Email**: carmen@helpingourselves.org

Describe the problem:
Current Maryland law does not specifically address the consideration of an individual's status as a victim of domestic violence during criminal proceedings against the individual. There is also an inherent question within the criminal justice system as to whether courts adequately recognize and consider histories of domestic violence when survivors become criminal defendants. Specifically for black American women, this concern intersects with documented disparities in domestic violence victimization, in the research describing racialized stereotyping, disbelief, inadequate protection, and in the criminalization that exist within the interactions with law enforcement and courts. Another core issue is not only whether black American women are protected from violence, but also whether their experiences are meaningfully recognized when they enter the criminal justice system.

Describe your proposed solution:
The 2027 PATH Act authorizes a defendant to introduce evidence that they were previously a victim of domestic violence, and that domestic violence was a significant contributing factor to the commission of the crime for which the defendant was convicted. Mitigating evidence may be introduced at sentencing or at a hearing on a motion for modification or reduction of the sentence if the motion is within the time frame specified by the bill. The defendant has the burden to establish, by a preponderance of the evidence, that domestic violence was a significant contributing factor to the defendant's commission of the crime. Evidence introduced may include records, reports, or testimony from the defendant, the defendant's family members or friends, law enforcement officers, medical professionals, counselors, advocates, social workers, or any other source the court considers relevant.

The 2027 PATH Act applies to defendants convicted of certain violent crimes defined under § 14-101 of the Criminal Law Article, excluding murder, sexual crimes, and specified abuse offenses. It also covers Title 5 controlled dangerous substance violations if the defendant was compelled by a perpetrator; Title 11, Subtitle 3 (Prostitution) or Title 3, Subtitle 11 (Human Trafficking) violations resulting from coercion, domination, or compulsion; specific property and financial crimes—such as extortion, burglary, trespassing, theft, bad checks, credit card crimes, identity fraud, or counterfeiting—when committed through coercion, control, or economic abuse arising from domestic violence; and any attempt, conspiracy, or solicitation to commit these offenses.

The 2027 PATH Act seeks to ensure that courts meaningfully consider a person's history of domestic violence when that abuse significantly contributed to the circumstances of a criminal offense. The legislation includes survivor-informed legal procedures, including consideration of domestic violence histories in sentencing and applicable sentence-review proceedings.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

From the Maryland Domestic Violence Fatality Review State Implementation Team (MD-DVFRSIT) the following data provides a brief summary of the impacts to women and communities of color in the court system.

- In 2022, Maryland recorded 40 domestic violence-related deaths, 26 were women described as victims and 14 bystanders.
- In 2023, Black American women accounted for 58% of domestic violence homicides and separately identified 13 abusive-partner deaths, including suicides and deaths involving law enforcement or self-defense by victims' friends.
- In 2024, 68% of women were domestically related crime victims; and of the intimate partner homicide victims, 95% are women – 30% are black women
- Black American Women experience a substantial share of domestic violence homicides. Emerging national research documents how black women survivors face disbelief, racialized stereotypes, limited protection, and criminalization in encounters with police and the courts.

Maryland's 2026 racial equity analysis also identifies a major data gap: the number of survivors prosecuted for offenses potentially eligible for the PATH Act sentencing considerations is unknown. These findings underscore the importance of carefully evaluating how courts identify and consider histories of abuse to women, while preserving individualized judicial decision-making and avoiding unsupported claims about the legislation's projected reach. Black individuals, specifically black women, are overrepresented as victims of domestically related crimes, and the legislation's intended sentence mitigation would likely be particularly beneficial to those victims

Equal Pay Commission – Staffing and Governance

One Sentence Synopsis: This bill transfers convening and staffing leadership for Maryland's Equal Pay Commission to the Maryland Commission for Women, while maintaining an active operational partnership with the Department of Labor. It also directs the Commission to research approaches to data collection in response to the Trump Administration's rollback of demographic and salary data collection efforts.

Committees: Senate Finance, House Economic Matters

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Antonio Hayes

Lead House Sponsor: Chair Kris Valderrama

Lead Group: Maryland Commission for Women

Lead Group Contact: Anecia Evans, Policy and Program Assistant **Email**: anecia.evans@maryland.gov

Describe the problem:
According to findings published in the Maryland Department of Labor 2026 Equal Pay Day Report and the Comptroller of Maryland Women and the Economy Report, Maryland ranks fifth nationally in gender wage parity, with women earning an average of 87 cents for every dollar earned by men. However, because Maryland is a high wage state, this percentage translates into a substantial dollar disparity: an average annual loss of $10,675 per woman, culminating in an estimated $427,000 in lost earnings over a 40 year career. With over 40% of Maryland mothers serving as primary or sole breadwinners, state data confirms this wage gap directly threatens household financial stability and contributes to a 16.1% poverty rate among single mother households.

Higher education does not shield women from inequality. Although Maryland women hold postsecondary degrees at higher rates than men (44.8% versus 41.9%), female graduates earn less across every degree level. State longitudinal data reveals that while female graduates out-earn men in three industries during their first year post college, by year ten there are zero industries where women maintain higher median earnings. These economic disparities are further compounded by occupational segregation in low wage care sectors documented by the Comptroller, high infant childcare costs identified by the Department of Labor as a primary barrier to workforce participation, and recent federal workforce contractions.

To address these systemic inequities, the General Assembly enacted Labor & Employment § 3–309 (https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Laws/StatuteText?article=gle&section=3-309&utm_source=chatgpt.com) to establish the Maryland Equal Pay Commission. However, convening and staffing authority currently rests solely within the Maryland Department of Labor. While the Department brings unmatched expertise in statutory enforcement and regulatory compliance, the Equal

Pay Commission requires dedicated capacity focused on gender policy analysis, community dialogue, and intersectional research to fulfill its full statutory mission.

Describe your proposed solution:

This bill modernizes the Commission's governance structure by transferring convening and staffing authority for the Maryland Equal Pay Commission to the Maryland Commission for Women (MCW), while institutionalizing an ongoing operational partnership with the Maryland Department of Labor (MDL).

This legislative solution benefits Maryland women by:

-Aligning Mission and Policy Focus: MCW's core statutory mandate is dedicated to identifying and advancing policy solutions for women's economic independence. Housing day to day administrative operations within MCW provides dedicated institutional focus on long term pay equity policy formulation, employer best practices, and statewide community outreach.

-Preserving Strong Enforcement Linkages: MDL retains a vital role in Commission governance and operations. Data, trends, and disparity analyses produced by the Commission will continue to inform MDL's direct enforcement of the Equal Pay for Equal Work Act and wage range transparency mandates.

-Modernizing Pay Data Infrastructure: The measure includes language directing the Equal Pay Commission to prioritize strategies responding to federal data collection shifts, including EEO 1 reporting changes. This ensures Maryland establishes robust employer data frameworks to evaluate wage disparities and hold employers accountable.

-Strengthening Institutional Governance: The bill formally integrates the MCW Executive Director (or designee) into the Commission's membership, ensuring direct executive leadership dedicated to advancing pay equity across the state.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Yes. While the overall wage gap in Maryland is significant, state reports demonstrate that pay inequities fall with disproportionate severity on women of color:

Hispanic women and Latinas earn 49 cents on the dollar statewide compared to non Hispanic white men, representing the fourth widest gap in the nation and resulting in a lifetime earnings loss of $1.93 million. This widens to 37 cents on the dollar in Montgomery County, where lifetime losses reach $3.41 million.

American Indian and Alaska Native women earn 47 cents on the dollar, experiencing a career deficit exceeding $2.01 million.

Black women earn 68 cents on the dollar, amounting to a lifetime career shortfall exceeding $1.20 million.

Federal Workforce Reductions: Recent contractions in Maryland's federal workforce have uniquely impacted Black women, who comprise 21% of Maryland's federal personnel despite making up 15% of the state's total population, contributing directly to a spike in Black unemployment rates.

This legislation specifically benefits communities of color by reorienting the Equal Pay Commission's staffing and research priorities toward intersectional demographic analysis and closing these racial wealth divides. Guaranteeing staffing within MCW establishes an intentional platform to recruit diverse representation to the Equal Pay Commission, ensuring that Black, Latina, and AAPI women, as well as leaders from impacted communities and low wage care sectors, directly guide statewide equal pay recommendations and policy interventions.

Nursing Home Financial Accountability Act

One Sentence Synopsis: This legislation will ensure that 75% of skilled nursing facility revenue goes towards direct care and the women-led workforce that provides it. This is an important step to improving state oversight of public dollars and positively impact both job and care quality.

Committees: Senate Finance, House Health

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Kramer

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Martinez

Lead Group: 1199 SEIU with Caring Across Maryland Coalition

Lead Group Contact: Loraine Arikat, Senior Policy Analyst **Email**: loraine.arikat@1199.org

Describe the problem:
Lack of oversight of public dollars in our state's nursing homes contributes to high staff turnover, low-quality jobs, and poor quality of care. Of the Maryland nursing home industry's $3.4 billion total annual revenue, only 53.8% is spent on resident care including direct care worker wages and benefits. The nursing home industry sits at the intersection of three groups that are overwhelmingly female: residents, workers, and family caregivers. When nursing home finances are opaque, when public dollars are diverted away from direct care, or when ownership structures shield operators from accountability, women bear the greatest burden.

90% of residential long term care workers are women and many are women of color and immigrants. In Maryland, the average hourly wage is $15.43 for nursing assistants in skilled nursing facilities. Direct care workers, including CNAs and nursing assistants, often remain among the lowest-paid health care workers even as nursing home owners receive substantial reimbursements. Chronic understaffing forces workers, primarily women, to take on more residents and responsibilities, leading to injury, stress, and workforce exits. The median annual turnover rate is 51.2%. Many direct care staff including custodial services, dietary aides, CNAs, and GNAs are working understaffed at multiple facilities to make ends meet. Medicaid and Medicare dollars can flow through complex ownership structures while facilities continue operating with inadequate staffing levels. Residents receive less care, while workers face heavier workloads.

Women subsidize the failures of the long-term care system through unpaid labor, lost wages, and reduced retirement security. Women provide the majority of unpaid caregiving in the United States and when nursing homes are inadequately staffed or prioritize profits over care, family members fill the gap. Daughters, wives, sisters, and granddaughters often become advocates, care coordinators, and monitors of care. Women lose income and career opportunities. Many working caregivers reduce hours, take leave, decline promotions, or leave jobs entirely because of caregiving responsibilities. Families experience stress when they cannot trust that public funding is being used to provide safe, quality care.

Financial vulnerability compounds care vulnerability. Many older women rely heavily on Medicaid, which pays for nearly two-thirds of nursing home residents. Women face greater exposure to poor-quality care. Since women constitute most long-stay residents, they are disproportionately affected by understaffing and quality deficiencies. Public dollars intended for care may not reach the bedside. Resources that could improve staffing, infection control, activities, or nutrition may instead be absorbed by management fees, related-party transactions, or complex ownership arrangements.

Describe your proposed solution:

This legislation will ensure that 75% of skilled nursing facility revenue goes towards direct care. This is an important step to improving state oversight of public dollars and positively impact both job and care quality.

Facilities will have to report they have met the 75% direct care cost requirement through their cost reports. Consumers, advocates, and researchers will be able to use this information when evaluating nursing homes and use of Medicaid and Medicare dollars. Further, the increased transparency and scrutiny of cost reports could incentivize nursing homes to use public dollars more prudently and ensure those dollars are being used for direct resident care.

Lack of nursing home fiscal accountability is not just a financial issue. It is a women's economic justice issue. When nursing home funds are not transparently linked to staffing, wages, and resident care, women pay the price three times: as workers, as family caregivers, and as residents. Strengthening financial transparency and accountability helps ensure that public dollars support quality care, fair jobs, and dignity for older adults and those with disabilities. When women are supported through structural changes like adequate staffing and higher pay at the work place, it can improve their overall wellbeing and ability to meet personal and family needs.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

Fiscal transparency is one step towards ensuring racial and economic justice for nursing home workers and patients. Fiscal transparency is one step towards ensuring racial and economic justice for nursing home workers and patients. According to the Maryland Comptroller's 2026 Industry Analysis on Healthcare, Black residents comprise 32% of the workers in healthcare practitioners and technical occupations, and 54% of healthcare support workers in Maryland, shares that are significantly higher than in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and are more than double national shares. The data also shows that the population of individuals living in the lowest-ranked facilities in Maryland are disproportionately people of color, mostly Black, and that is not an accident. Systemic racism lies at the root of these disparities, manifesting by racially segregated care, low Medicaid reimbursement, and lack of livable wages for staff, all of which exacerbate disparities. This bill will ensure public dollars go toward care and protect the health, safety, and rights of residents and staff.

The Maryland Caregiver Employment Protection Act

One Sentence Synopsis: The Maryland Caregiver Employment Protection Act would prohibit workplace discrimination based on actual or perceived caregiving responsibilities, protecting Marylanders who care for children, aging parents, family members, and other loved ones from unfair treatment in hiring, pay, promotions, and other aspects of employment.

Committees: House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Lesley Lopez

Lead Group: AARP Maryland

Lead Group Contact: Sara Westrick, Advocacy Director **Email**: swestrick@aarp.org

Describe the problem:
Millions of Americans balance paid employment with the responsibility of caring for children, aging parents, family members with disabilities, and other loved ones. These caregivers provide essential support to their families and communities, often while managing significant financial and professional demands. Yet Maryland law does not explicitly protect workers from employment discrimination because of their caregiving responsibilities.

Women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid caregiving responsibilities, making them particularly vulnerable to workplace discrimination. Employers may assume that a mother with young children, a woman caring for an aging parent, or an employee supporting a family member with a chronic illness is less reliable, committed, or available for professional opportunities. These assumptions can result in discriminatory hiring decisions, denied promotions, reduced hours, unequal treatment, or termination, regardless of an individual's qualifications or job performance.

The consequences extend beyond individual workers. When caregivers are pushed out of employment or denied advancement, families lose income, retirement savings, and long-term financial security. These impacts are particularly significant for women, who already experience persistent wage and retirement savings disparities.

Although Maryland has taken important steps to support working families through paid family and medical leave and other workplace protections, these policies do not explicitly prohibit discrimination based solely on an individual’s caregiving responsibilities. A worker should not have to choose between maintaining economic independence and fulfilling essential responsibilities to loved ones.
The Maryland Caregiver Employment Protection Act addresses this gap by recognizing that caregiving responsibilities should not determine a person's access to employment, professional advancement, or economic opportunity.

Describe your proposed solution:

The Maryland Caregiver Employment Protection Act would amend Maryland's existing employment anti-discrimination law to establish "caregiver status" as a protected characteristic. Employers would be prohibited from discriminating against workers or job applicants because of their actual or perceived caregiving responsibilities, including in hiring, termination, compensation, promotions, and other conditions of employment.

The legislation would protect individuals who provide direct and ongoing care for minor children or for another person who relies on them for medical care or assistance with daily living. Importantly, the proposed 2027 legislation would recognize that caregiving extends beyond traditional family structures and formal disability classifications. Protections would include individuals caring for aging parents who need assistance but do not have a diagnosed disability, as well as those caring for relatives, domestic partners, and individuals with whom they have committed, family-like relationships.

The bill would also protect workers from discrimination based on perceived caregiving responsibilities. For example, an employer could not deny a qualified woman a promotion based on an assumption that her responsibilities as a mother would prevent her from accepting additional work.

The legislation would operate within Maryland's existing civil rights enforcement framework, with complaints handled by the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights. It would not independently require employers to provide additional leave, flexible schedules, or workplace accommodations. Rather, it would ensure that employment decisions are based on qualifications, performance, and legitimate job requirements instead of stereotypes about caregiving.

This proposal builds on HB 724, introduced during the 2026 legislative session, which received substantial support from organizations representing caregivers, women, older adults, people with disabilities, and workers. The revised legislation incorporates feedback from the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights and Baltimore City to clarify the scope of protections and strengthen implementation. For Maryland women, the legislation would help preserve employment opportunities, prevent discriminatory barriers to career advancement, and protect long-term financial security. By recognizing caregiving as a responsibility that should not diminish an individual's professional opportunities, Maryland can strengthen workplace equity and economic independence for women across the state.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

The Maryland Caregiver Employment Protection Act would particularly benefit women of color, who often experience overlapping challenges related to caregiving responsibilities, employment discrimination, and economic inequality.

Research from AARP, the National Alliance for Caregiving, and other organizations demonstrates that Black and Latina caregivers frequently provide intensive unpaid care for children, older adults, and family members with disabilities while simultaneously participating in the paid workforce. These responsibilities can create significant financial and professional challenges, particularly for workers in lower-wage positions or jobs with limited scheduling flexibility.

Black and Latina women may also encounter compounded discrimination based on race, gender, and assumptions about family responsibilities. For example, an employer may assume that a woman caring for children or an aging relative will be less dependable or committed to her job, limiting opportunities for hiring, advancement, or continued employment.

The legislation would address these inequities by explicitly prohibiting employment discrimination based on actual or perceived caregiver status. These protections would help workers of color maintain employment, pursue professional advancement, and preserve financial stability while fulfilling essential caregiving responsibilities.

By protecting caregivers across a broad range of family structures, including extended families and chosen families, the bill would also recognize the diverse caregiving arrangements found throughout Maryland's communities.

Ultimately, this legislation would advance racial, gender, and economic equity by helping ensure that women of color are not forced to sacrifice professional opportunities or financial security because they provide essential care to loved ones.

Maryland Construction Workforce Health and Sanitation Act

One Sentence Synopsis: Requires construction employers to provide appropriate restroom and sanitation accommodations for women and workers who menstruate, including secure restroom facilities, menstrual products, adequate restroom access, and reasonable accommodations for expressing and storing breast milk.

Committees: House Economic Matters, To Be Determined

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senator Rosapepe, TBD

Lead House Sponsor: TBD

Lead Group: Maryland Center for Construction Education & Innovation (MCCEI)

Lead Group Contact: Jennifer Dewees, President **Email**: jdewees@mccei.org

Describe the problem:
Maryland is investing significant resources in expanding its construction workforce and creating pathways for more women to enter skilled trades and construction careers. However, many construction jobsites were designed around a workforce that historically has been overwhelmingly male, and basic jobsite conditions have not always evolved as the workforce has changed.

Women working in the field can encounter inadequate restroom privacy and security, limited access to menstrual products, difficulty taking sufficient restroom time while wearing multiple layers of work clothing and personal protective equipment, and a lack of appropriate facilities for expressing and safely storing breast milk. These are not simply matters of convenience. They are workplace health, safety, dignity, and retention issues.

Women remain dramatically underrepresented in construction trades despite the availability of well-paying careers that can provide economic independence without requiring a four-year college degree. Maryland cannot address that disparity solely by recruiting more women into construction. We must also address workplace conditions that can make it unnecessarily difficult for women to remain in the industry.

Federal standards establish basic sanitation requirements for construction sites, but they do not comprehensively address the needs of women working in the field. Other states have begun modernizing construction standards to address these gaps. Maryland has an opportunity to do the same and ensure that the infrastructure of our jobsites reflects the workforce we are actively working to build.

Describe your proposed solution:
The Maryland Construction Workforce Health and Sanitation Act would establish construction-specific workplace standards addressing restroom access, menstruation, and lactation.

The legislation would require covered construction sites to provide workers who menstruate with access to a secure restroom facility with an internal locking mechanism; adequate time to use restroom facilities when wearing multiple layers of work clothing and personal protective equipment; and an adequate and conveniently accessible supply of menstrual products at no cost.

The legislation would also require reasonable accommodations for workers who need to express breast milk, including adequate break time, access to a private and sanitary location other than a bathroom, and appropriate means for safely storing expressed milk.

The legislation would direct the Maryland Department of Labor to establish appropriate implementation standards for construction worksites, including consideration of site size, workforce size, multi-employer worksites, and other practical differences among construction projects.

These standards would remove unnecessary barriers to women's participation and retention in construction while establishing clear, consistent expectations for employers. The goal is not simply to recruit more women into construction, but to create jobsites where women can build sustainable, family-supporting careers.

Benefit to Communities of Color:
Yes. Women of color face the intersection of two significant areas of underrepresentation in many construction occupations: gender and, in some trades and career pathways, race and ethnicity. Maryland and its workforce partners are actively investing in apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and construction workforce programs intended to expand access to family-supporting careers for historically underrepresented populations. Recruitment alone, however, is not sufficient. Workers must enter jobsites with conditions that support their ability to remain and advance in the industry.

By removing workplace barriers related to restroom access, menstruation, and lactation, this legislation supports the retention and advancement of women of all backgrounds, including women of color, in construction careers that offer strong wages, benefits, apprenticeship opportunities, and pathways to economic independence.

Granny's Law

One Sentence Synopsis: Granny's Law is a Correction of Historical Wrongs in the Estate and Probate System.

Committees: Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

Lead Senate Sponsor: TBD

Lead House Sponsor: Delegate Sandy Rosenberg

Lead Group: D4 Women in Action

Lead Group Contact: Rhonda Briggins, President **Email**: presidentd42020@gmail.com

Describe the problem:
Granny's Law becoming statutory law will allow the existing language in most written wills to be actualized, undoing historical wrongs of case law, which was formed by telling vulnerable grieving families to ignore the written will and instead follow the directions of expensive lawyers.

The probate system as a whole comes from a background of slave owners and wealthy men treating women, other classes and enslaved as property. It has its roots in ancient Rome, Medieval England and Colonial America prior to the abolishment of slavery. The legal field is currently and was historically, male dominated; hence equitable remedies are often biased against women and minorities. Historically, women frequently take on the role of caregiver in life and hence are many times also the personal representative or estate executor in death.

Describe your proposed solution:
Approximately 2.6 million people in the United States go through Probate on an annual basis. While it is unknown exactly how many Maryland residents go through probate annually, we on an annual basis lose approximately 61,000 Maryland citizens to death. State recorded data shows that life expectance is higher for women in Maryland and yearly death rates for men are higher than their female counterparts. Hence, we can estimate based on the death totals alone that thousands of Marylanders, more women than men, will benefit from Granny's Law.

Caregivers often times neglect themselves taking care of others. Then these same caregivers are forced by the probate system to repeat this unhealthy practice of putting everyone's needs before their own. This legislation will allow the one who has done most of the work caring for the deceased in life and in death to use existing language in most written wills instead of the current practice of existing language being ignored by lawyers and judges to make large profits.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

"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 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, what the Maryland General Assembly already sees as a priority, by having the Subcommittee on Public Health and Minority Health Disparities formed in 2004.

Department of Housing and Community Development Operating Budget - Community Schools Rental Assistance Program

One Sentence Synopsis: The Bill will include the addition of $24 million in general funds to the appropriation for Homeless Solutions within the Department of Housing and Community Development for the purpose of supplementing funding for the Community Schools Rental Assistance Program (CSRAP).

Committees: Senate Budget and Taxation, House Appropriations

Lead Senate Sponsor: Senate President (Budget Bill)

Lead House Sponsor: Speaker of the House (Budget Bill)

Lead Group: Maryland Eviction Prevention Funds Alliance

Lead Group Contact: Katie Davis, Director, PBRC Courtroom Advocacy Project **Email**: kdavis@probonomd.org

Describe the problem:

There is an ongoing housing crisis in Maryland and low-income renting households, which are predominantly led by single women, are often the hardest hit. As the federal government continues to cut funding to the social safety net, families must pay more for food and health care while also shouldering rising utilities, gas and rent. More families than ever are only one hospital stay or week of lost work away from eviction and homelessness. Maryland families are particularly precarious. 21% of poverty in Maryland is driven by high housing costs. https://marylandmatters.org/2026/09/29/21-of-poverty-in-maryland-driven-by-high-housing-costs-report-says/. Women, in particular women of color, are more likely than men to be living in poverty and thus be at risk of homelessness. https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2023_nwlc_PovertySnapshot-converted.pdf

While the Community Schools Rental Assistance Program (CSRAP) stands in the gap, providing a lifeline to housing stability, it is grossly underfunded. Legislatively created in 2024, this Program connects families with children to vital rental assistance when they need it most. Last year the Program distributed the $11 million allocated almost immediately upon opening, and in just three months received applications for over $31 million in assistance. While these funds helped 1,190 families (over 4,000 people) avoid eviction, there were many thousands of others who were left out. Women and people of color were the largest groups impacted by this Program. Of the families assisted, 90% identified a woman as the head of household, and 84% identified as African American or mixed race. https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoiODA4OWFmN2EtZmJmOS00MmFkLWI0OTQtOGRhYmFiYTdhMDQzIiwidCI6IjdkM2I4ZDAwLWY5YmUtNDZlNy05NDYwLTRlZjJkOGY3MzE0OSJ9

Describe your proposed solution:

This Budget Bill will ensure that the CSRAP is funded in a way that will ensure more families are able to get assistance. It will request an allocation of $20 million to CSRAP, which will help nearly 16,000 children and parents in 4,400 families avoid eviction and homelessness by paying an average $4,500 in rent debt, plus security deposits and utilities where necessary to maintain housing stability. This will result in a $47.8 million in savings to the State and allow the Program to be expanded from just eight Maryland jurisdictions to eleven or twelve across the State.

The concept behind the Program is simple. Statistics demonstrate not only that children are most likely to be at risk of eviction, but that the educational opportunities of those children suffer tremendously from the risk of eviction alone, not to mention the negative impact of an actual eviction. https://www.hchmd.org/homelessness-maryland. This Program was a natural marriage between housing assistance and the schools. By engaging schools and school staff, DHCD found that these funds reached families who otherwise would not have gained assistance. Parents, typically mothers, often have relationships with the schools already, so working together to gain housing stability is a logical choice. This is a Program with a proven track record of improving the lives of women and children and a documented need for additional funding.

Benefit to Communities of Color:

CSRAP helps mitigate Maryland's history of discriminatory housing policies. In FY 2026 70% of the applicants for CSRAP funds were families headed by Black mothers making less than $59,000 annually, mirroring the fact that black and brown Marylanders are more likely than others to be at risk of eviction. See https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/02/upshot/evictions-children-american-renters.html. Stable housing is vital for all communities, but especially for communities of color that have been systemically destabilized. Increased funding for CSRAP will have a direct impact of housing stability for thousands of families in need within these communities.

2027 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 **2027 Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women.**