



Celebrating 50 Years of Advancing Justice

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Friend of the WLC

As we enter the third full week of session, committees are starting to schedule voting sessions in preparation of moving bills to the chamber floor for a full vote. At the same time, more bills that go to the core of what the WLC works for are being heard in committee this week as well. This includes a host of legislation related to sexual assault and domestic violence, with none being more significant than [HB 153 - Criminal Law - Sexual Crimes - Repeal of Spousal Defense](#) – which is back again this year after a heartbreaking end on *sine die* that saw the bill fail to make it through to law, and [HB 148 – Criminal Law – Stalking – Definition](#), which will modernize our current stalking laws and allow victims of electronic stalking legal protections. These bills are some of the most important bills we'll take up this session when it comes to survivors of gender-based violence.

Tuesday, January 25th

[HB 78 - Discrimination in Employment - Reasonable Accommodations for Applicants With Disabilities](#) (Economic Matters)

Women with disabilities are more likely to be low-income wage earners or to live in poverty compared to men with disabilities and both men and women without disabilities. The on-going pandemic has compounded these issues, and the effects on women with disabilities in the workforce have been especially severe. They are more likely to be unable to report to work because their employer closed or lost business, and more likely to work in an occupation where there is higher likelihood of Covid-19 exposure, such as service industries. As we struggle to get women to return to the workforce, it is imperative to include women with disabilities in the conversation and to provide applicants with the opportunities and accommodations they need to return to work.

[HB 164 - Institutions of Higher Education - Pregnant Students - Policy](#) (Appropriations) Favorable With Amendments

This laudable legislation aims to ensure that pregnant and parenting students in our colleges and universities are given the consideration they need to continue their studies while also taking time to care for their families. The current version provides up to 12 months of excused leave for a student who has just given birth and up to 1 month of leave for the non-birth giving parent. The WLC has respectfully suggested amendments to allow 12 months of leave for any parent, regardless of birth status, to ensure equity for adoptive and same-sex couples, as well as to remove harmful gender stereotypes regarding whose responsibility it is to care for children.

[HB 209 - Criminal Law – Unnatural or Perverted Sexual Practice – Repeal](#) (Judiciary)

In 2020 the legislator took aims to repeal the homophobic sodomy law, but vestiges remain, including a section outlawing “unnatural and perverted sex acts”. HB 209 would repeal the remaining law, and ensure people are free to engage in consensual activity as they mutually choose without the risk of government interference or criminal prosecution.

Wednesday, January 26th

[SB17 - Child Custody - Cases Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence - Training for Judges](#) (Judicial Proceedings)

[SB 41 - Family Law – Child Custody and Visitation](#)(Judicial Proceedings)
Senate Bill 17 would require a certain number of hours and certain curriculum for judges who will sit on family law cases. Senate Bill 41 require a court to articulate its findings in custody cases where allegations of domestic violence

or sexual assault are presented. Both SB 17 and SB 41 arise out of the Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations, of which the WLC was an appointed member. They were both also introduced last year and are back again this session. The WLC supports both bills in concept, with some minor amendments to strengthen them.

Thursday, January 27th

[HB104 - Family Law - Child Custody and Visitation](#) (Judiciary)

This is the cross-file to SB 41.

[HB 110 - Criminal Law - Stalking – Penalties](#) (Judiciary)

[HB 148 - Criminal Law - Stalking – Definition](#) (Judiciary)

A challenge we consistently see in our representation of survivors of intimate partner violence is a failure of our laws to keep up to date with modern technology, even as abusers become more technologically savvy. Currently our criminal stalking statute only addresses physical forms of stalking a victim. However, as we see all too often, most stalking is committed using electronic means, either via spyware or tracking apps on cell phones, hiding a GPS tracker in a victim's car, putting a camera or listening device in a child's toy in order to hear/watch what happens at the victim's home, or installing spyware on a victim's computer. These two critically important pieces of legislation will modernize our laws to ensure survivors are able to get the protections they deserve from our justice system.

[HB 153 - Criminal Law - Sexual Crimes - Repeal of Spousal Defense](#) (Judiciary)

Unbelievably, Maryland laws still allow marriage to serve as a complete defense to some sex crimes, meaning that a survivor of sexual assault who is married to the perpetrator has less legal recourse than an unmarried victim. This bill is crucial for domestic violence and sexual assault survivors to be safe in their homes and receive the justice they deserve for the crimes against them. The idea that rape or sexual assault is tolerated because the parties are married is insulting, dangerous, and based on arcane beliefs that women belong to their husbands. The time has come to make sure we change the law in Maryland.

Onward,

The WLC Advocacy Team

P.S. As always, if you appreciate the work we do, whether in the General Assembly or through our [direct legal services](#) across the State, [give here!](#)

P.P.S. Make sure you mark down these upcoming events of interest from our sister-partners and allies:

The [42nd Annual Women's Legislative Briefing](#), hosted by the [Montgomery County Commission for Women](#), will be held virtually on Sunday, January 30th from 12:30-4:30pm.

The [Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women](#) has announced their [2022 Legislative Agenda](#). Find out more about the bills they are supporting at their [Annual \(virtual\) Legislative Briefing](#) on Thursday, February 3rd, 5-6:30pm. Sign-on to support the agenda [here](#).

On February 16th, the Maryland State Bar Association, with the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, is hosting its virtual [MSBA DAY](#) from 8:30am-12:30pm where members can hear directly from elected officials and learn about the legislative issues most important to the MSBA and to the Access to Justice Commission.

The time to pass the [Time to Care Act](#) and provide paid family leave to Marylanders is NOW. Join advocates and the [Time to Care coalition](#) for a rally to support paid family leave at Lawyer's Mall on Monday, February 21st (note this is a date change from what we shared last week). More details TBD.

Finally, join our friends at the [Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence](#) as they honor and remember the lives lost in the past year to intimate partner violence at their virtual [Memorial Service](#), February 22nd at 4pm.

GIVE TODAY

Sponsorships and tickets now available for our 50th Anniversary Celebration & Awards Ceremony!

About The Women's Law Center of Maryland

The vision of the Women's Law Center of Maryland is a legal system that provides justice and fairness for women. The Women's Law Center's mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and autonomy of women throughout the State. We work towards this goal by providing direct legal representation, information and referral services, and legislative advocacy.

Our efforts to promote justice, fairness, and equality for women are only possible because of friends like you.

[Give Today](#)

The Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. is a charitable organization designated as tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3). A copy of our financial statement is available upon request. Documents and information submitted under the State of Maryland Charitable Solicitations Act are available from the Office of the Secretary of State of Maryland, Annapolis, MD 21401 for the cost of copying and postage.

