



## Celebrating 50 Years of Advancing Justice

### Listen. Engage. Advocate

Friend of the WLC

Today marks the beginning of Black History Month and there are a lot of different ways to celebrate across the state. Another great way to highlight and celebrate the contributions of the Black community within Maryland and the nation, is to engage in the legislative process – in particular as it comes to addressing systemic racism within our schools, justice system, and government. Bills working towards anti-racist systems we are following this week include: HB244 - Civil Actions - Damages - Use of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Data, HB159 - Marshall-Coates Task Force for Racial Justice and Reconciliation, and HB290 - Hate Crimes – Civil Remedy. Let us all pledge to more than platitudes when it comes to working towards ending systemic racism – not just this month, and not just during the legislative session, but all year long!

Additionally, tomorrow is the Chinese Lunar New Year. My family will be celebrating the year of the Water Tiger with long noodles for health, dumplings for prosperity, and red envelopes filled with gifts for our children, nieces, and nephews! Gung Hay Fat Choy!

Looking at the work at hand, as we enter our fourth week of the 44<sup>th</sup> legislative session, we incredibly have at least 30 pieces of legislation that the WLC is monitoring, supporting, and/or testifying on in Annapolis. These bills cover everything from the Senate cross-file for the repeal of marriage as a defense to sex crimes, to access to counsel, to taxing essential baby items, and reaching survivors of intimate partner violence seeking protective orders while still in the hospital. Each bill seeks to address a barrier to women's access to physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy. And each bill has a person connected to it – a real Marylander, a real family, a real survivor. Our support for these laws and those women must be unequivocal and collective.

Below is a sampling of the highest priorities being heard this week.

#### **Tuesday, February 1st**

##### SB20 Criminal Procedure – Out of Court Statements – Child Victims

This bill will allow statements made by children under the age of 13 regarding abuse they've experienced or witnesses to be allowed into court without the child having to testify in person. It would reduce the need for that child to be retraumatized by having to share their experiences in open court, when there is no need to discredit the original statement.

##### SB21 Criminal Procedure - Sentencing - Primary Caretaker

Women are being incarcerated at an increasingly high rate - and are convicted at a disproportionately higher rate for nonviolent crimes. At the same time, those women are predominantly mothers and 80% of them are single mothers. When they are then sent to prison and separated from their children, both suffer. This bill will allow non-violent offenders who are primary caretakers to stay within their communities and with their families.

##### SB33 Criminal Law - Sexual Crimes - Repeal of Spousal Defense

Last year the House passed this bill as is, but things got tangled up in the Senate. This is our chance to make sure the Senate passes the bill without amendments to ensure that marriage is never a defense to a sexual crime.

#### **Wednesday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>**

##### HB114 Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

Legal representation is fundamental to safeguarding fair, equal, and meaningful access to the legal system. Yet, there is no right to appointed counsel in civil matters, including in immigration proceedings. Nonetheless, we know that immigrants with representation are nearly six times more likely to have a successful outcome than those without representation. This legislation would

establish a right to counsel in certain immigration proceedings.

[HB282 Sales and Use Tax - Diapers – Exemption](#)

[HB288 Sales and Use Tax - Baby Products – Exemption](#)

As women still struggle with the economic fall-out of the pandemic, as well as the ever-persistent gender pay gap, yet they are still the primary consumer when it comes to child care products. These two bills would ensure that we are not taxing fundamental items that are necessary and essential for the care of a child such as diapers and car seats.

[HB290 Hate Crimes – Civil Remedy](#)

Hate crime laws matter. In addition to deterring criminal activity, they possess important symbolic meaning that signals to targeted communities that the government cares and that law enforcement will take their concerns seriously. This bill would create a civil remedy for victims of hate crimes to pursue in addition to criminal charges.

**Thursday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>**

[HB284 Criminal Procedure - Out of Court Statements - Child Victims](#)

This is the cross-file of SB20.

[HB296 Interim and Temporary Protective Orders - Electronic Filing and Video Conferencing Hearings](#)

This is an incredibly important bill that seeks to meet survivors where they are – literally. The pandemic has shown that alternative methods of seeking justice, e.g., virtual petitions to the court, are effective ways of increasing access to justice. By allowing survivors of domestic violence to petition a commissioner for a temporary or interim protective order remotely, while still at the hospital or urgent care center, removes a huge barrier from survivors, making it more likely that they move forward with their case.

[SB129 Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program](#)

This is the cross-file of HB114.

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 [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 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5-6:30pm. Sign-on to support the agenda [here](#).

On February 16<sup>th</sup>, 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 21<sup>st</sup> (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 22<sup>nd</sup> 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.*

