



## Celebrating 50 Years of Advancing Justice

### Listen. Engage. Advocate

Friend of the WLC

After this week we should *theoretically* know the entirety of the universe of legislation being deliberated by the General Assembly this session. Today marks the day by which members of the Senate had to have their bills introduced – bills introduced after this deadline will have to be voted out of the Senate Rules Committee prior to moving on. The House bill introduction deadline is this Friday. After that, we will see significantly fewer bills drop; but until then we can expect to see a flurry of legislation be introduced as legislators scramble to make sure their bills don't get stuck in the process.

In the meantime, bills continue to be heard, and this week we will see a number of pieces of legislation aimed at creating equity and dignity within our carceral system for women. Falling on the heels of last year's important veto-override of 2020's [SB648](#) that created [a pre-release program for incarcerated women](#) in Maryland, legislators are working this year to address other inequities as the number of women in Maryland prisons having increased by over 400% over the past 40 years.

We will also be testifying on two important bills aimed at increasing the ability of survivors of domestic violence to file for protective orders, and we will finally have the first hearing for the Time to Care Act – both are priority bills for the WLC this year and both need your support to make it across the finish line.

#### Tuesday, February 8th

##### [HB 337 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. The Senate version, [SB 21](#), was heard last week awaits a vote by the Judicial Proceedings Committee.

##### [HB 454 Correctional Services - Pregnancy and Postpartum Support \(Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act\)](#)

Similar to the Primary Caretaker bill, HB 454 relies upon the principal that keeping families together can often be the best thing for the children, the parents, and the community at large. Most incarcerated women have less than 48 hours with their newborns before the baby is forcibly separated from them,

leading to permanent adverse health and emotional conditions for the children and mother alike.

### [HB 453 Correctional Facilities - Transgender, Nonbinary, and Intersex Inmates \(Transgender Respect, Agency, and Dignity Act\)](#)

Transgender people are 13 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than non-transgender people in prison and are also disproportionately arrested, incarcerated, and otherwise harassed. This legislation aims to address the challenge of discrimination within correctional housing by requiring correctional institutes to utilize proper pronouns and house inmates according to their gender identity, rather than sex-at-birth. This policy is required to ensure incarcerated transgender individuals are properly housed, recognized, and treated with respect and dignity, resulting in less violence overall within the system.

### [HB 426 Vehicle Laws - Policies and Prohibition Against Discriminatory Traffic Stops](#)

The Women's Law Center of Maryland recognizes that the intersectionality of race and gender, as well as gender-identity, can play a large role in how individuals are perceived by the police. This law would make clear that an individual's race, gender, religion, or other membership in a protected class should play no role in whether they are stopped by law enforcement.

### [SB 328 Criminal Law - Stalking – Definition](#)

The House version of this bill was heard last month, and it is one of the WLC's top priorities this session when it comes to supporting survivors of intimate partner violence. A challenge we consistently see in our legal cases 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, 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. This bill will modernize our laws to ensure survivors are able to get the protections they deserve from our justice system.

## **Wednesday, February 9th**

### [SB 280 Interim and Temporary Protective Orders - Electronic Filing and Video Conferencing Hearings](#)

Another bill whose cross-file has already been heard, SB 280 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.

### [SB 315 Courts - Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation](#)

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP suits) use the court system to intentionally target survivors, whistleblowers, and advocates who speak out against powerful perpetrators, creating a chilling effect on other victims who may seek to do the same. They have become an all-too common tool at silencing criticism and intimidating victims, something we have seen

firsthand when it comes to brave survivors who have sought legal redress either through the courts or through collegiate grievance systems. This legislation would have created a burden on plaintiffs in certain circumstances, in responding to a motion to dismiss, to show that an alleged SLAPP suit had substantial justification in law and fact.

### [SB 377 Marriage Records - Name Change](#)

There is currently no formal process in Maryland law to change an individual's name on a marriage certificate after the fact, even if you have subsequently changed your name through the courts. This is a challenge both for transgender individuals who wish to ensure their marriage certificate reflects their proper name, as well as for survivors of sexual violence who may have changed their name to evade stalkers or non-spousal abusers. This bill would allow the issuance of a new marriage certificate with amended names.

### **Thursday, February 10<sup>th</sup>**

### [SB 275 Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment \(Time to Care Act of 2022\)](#)

This is the first hearing this year for the Time to Care Act – a piece of legislation that is long overdue. Imagine a world where women did not have to return to work 10 days after giving birth (the average in the US), or where men could take the time off they needed to care for their partners who are ill. Imagine not having to worry about losing your income on top of having to worry about the health of an ailing parent or child. Imagine how many families would be better off right now, or how many workers would still have their jobs right now, if we had Paid Family Leave in Maryland throughout the pandemic. By utilizing a system very similar to unemployment insurance, the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program (FAMLI) would allow workers to take the time off they need to care for themselves or their family members, without fear of losing their jobs or their paychecks. Because at some point, everyone will need Time to Care.

### [HB 369 Marriage Records – Name Change](#)

This is the House version of SB 377.

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:

Have a heart and join advocacy groups such as [Healthcare for the Homeless](#), [Maryland Healthcare for All Coalition](#), [the Public Justice Center](#), [ProChoice Maryland](#), and [Progressive Maryland](#) for [Health Justice Lobby Day](#) on Monday, February 14<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. For more information or to register go [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> at 6:30pm. Register for the Rally and find out more information [HERE](#).

If it's a little too cold to venture outside, but you still want to make sure you're part of the pro-choice movement in Maryland, join MLAW, WLC, ProChoice Maryland and other sponsor organizations for the annual Gender Justice Rally being held on Zoom on Monday, February 21<sup>st</sup> at 6pm. More information 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.*

