



Celebrating 50 Years of Advancing Justice

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Friend of the WLC

Happy Valentine's Day!

I am incredibly happy to report that [House Bill 153 - Criminal Law - Sexual Crimes - Repeal of Spousal Defense](#) successfully made it out of the House Judiciary Committee on Friday without any damaging amendments. This means that the bill will head to the House for a floor vote, while we anxiously await the actions of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. Many thanks to the sponsor, Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield, and of course to all of YOU for advocating on behalf of this important piece of legislation. In addition to the spousal rape bill, I am equally happy that [House Bill 148 – Criminal Law – Stalking – Definition](#), as well as [House Bill 70 – Courts – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation](#), also passed out of the House Judiciary Committee, thanks to your support. All three bills, if enacted, will benefit survivors and bring our laws closer to gender equity.

While bills are starting to be voted on, we are also headed into the busiest time for Committee hearings, with nearly forty bills we are monitoring having hearings this week. With the Senate holding hearings back in-person, and the House remaining virtual, it will be interesting to see how things play out. But we will be there in support of – or in the case of one very anti-choice bill, in opposition to – those bills that we know will have the biggest impact on the lives of women.

Tuesday, February 15th

[HB 8 Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment \(Time to Care Act of 2022\)](#)

[HB 496 – Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment](#)

Both of these bills are seeking to address one of the biggest systemic challenges women face to full time, meaningful employment: a lack of paid family leave. By establishing a system very similar to the unemployment insurance fund, 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. HB 8 is the original Time to Care bill that we have been advocating on for several years, while HB 496 was introduced for the first time this year by the new chair of the House Economic Matters Committee. While there are some substantive differences between the two bills, BOTH ensure that all workers would be covered by the FAMLI program and as such, the WLC is supporting both version.

[HB 645 Hate Crimes – False Statement to a Law Enforcement Officer](#)

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 ensure that attempts at weaponizing the police, by making false statements against someone due to their race or other status in a protected class, is given the attention it deserves and treated as a hate crime.

[SB 450 - Harassment and Sexual Harassment - Definitions - Employment Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Prevention Training](#)

This bill works to address the staggeringly difficult threshold known as the “severe and pervasive” standard that victims of workplace harassment must overcome in order to make a claim in court. It makes clear that there is a broad spectrum of harassment that must be taken seriously and that the lived experiences of victims must be the focus of evaluating these cases, not just the severity or frequency of the perpetrator’s acts. Women deserve a workplace that is free from harassment and they deserve to have legal recourse when it’s not.

[SB 486 - Places of Public Accommodation and Public Buildings - Gender-Inclusive Signage](#)

This bill is attempting to accomplish the very simple task of ensuring that restrooms in public buildings and general places of public accommodations have signage that is gender-inclusive so that everyone can feel respected and safe when utilizing those facilities in public.

Wednesday, February 16th

[HB 306 – Election Law – Circuit Court Judges – Nonpartisan General Elections \(Favorable with Amendments\)](#)

An integral part of our advocacy work includes working to ensure that our judiciary is free of gender and race bias and representative of the communities it serves. We advance that goal by participating in the judicial selection process, where our Judicial Selections Committee interviews candidates for all trial and appellate courts, in every county and provides letters to the Governor's office ranking the candidates. This legislation is working to make sure that judicial elections are non-partisan in nature. While we appreciate and applaud the attempt at addressing the challenges of judicial elections, the WLC would prefer to see the legislation go further by ensuring that circuit court judges are removed altogether from contested elections. We believe very strongly that politics and the judiciary should not mix.

[HB 572 - Places of Public Accommodation and Public Buildings - Gender-Inclusive Signage](#)

This is the cross-file of SB 486, which will be heard the day prior.

[SB 504 – Equal Protection of Unborn Human Beings Act of 2022 \(Oppose\)](#)

This bill is a blatant attack on the bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. We stand firmly with other advocates in opposing any legislation that jeopardizes a woman's right to choose and interferes with a doctor's ability to treat their patients. At a time when we should be *removing* barriers to access to abortion care, there is no place for these types of laws in Maryland.

Thursday, February 17th

[HB 561 - Child Custody - Cases Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence - Training for Judges](#)

HB 561 would require a certain number of hours a particular training curriculum for judges who sit on family law cases. We support this bill with amendments, because while we fully agree with the concept of training for judges on these important issues, there are some technical issues with the bill that must be addressed.

[HB 639 – Family Law – Grounds for Divorce](#)

House Bill 639 would allow individuals who still live under the same roof to move forward with divorce proceedings under certain circumstances and reduce the period of required separation before they can file for divorce from 12 months to 6 months. For many people, financial hardships prevent them from physically separating until a divorce is finalized, but the law does not allow them to file until they have lived apart. This will simplify divorce law in Maryland and help people get out of harmful relationships without unnecessary barriers.

[HB 833 - Criminal Law - Victims of Child Sex Trafficking - Safe Harbor and Service Response](#)

This is an important bill that will prevent the prosecution, or delinquency proceeding, against a child who has committed a crime due to their status as a survivor of sex trafficking. Sex traffickers often target runaway and homeless youth, as well as children who have been abused or neglected. When minors are forced to engage in commercial sex, it places them at risk for prosecution under prostitution laws. Safe Harbor laws ensure that trafficked children are treated as victims, not criminals, and provide access to medical care, safe housing, remedial education, and counseling services.

[SB 530 Maryland Fair Scheduling Act](#)

This bill seeks to address the challenges many workers experience, particularly within the retail and restaurant industries, when it comes to unreliability of scheduling. Employees increasingly face "just-in-time" scheduling practices, including being given very little notice of their work schedules, being sent home early when work is slow without being paid for their scheduled shifts, and being assigned to "on-call" shifts that require them to call their employer (or wait to be called) to find out whether they will be required to report to work. Many employees have very little ability to make adjustments to their work schedules without penalty. The WLC fully and wholly supports legislation that will improve

workplace scheduling practices so that working people and their families can better plan their lives, even while this legislation would benefit from additional fine-tuning.

[SB 550 -- Correctional Facilities - Transgender, Nonbinary, and Intersex Inmates \(Transgender Respect, Agency, and Dignity Act\)](#)

The cross-file version of this bill has already been heard. It is a good bill that works to address the discriminatory practices within correctional facilities that lead to violence against transgender inmates.

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](#) TONIGHT, Monday, February 14th via Zoom. For more information or to register go [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 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 21st 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 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.

