



## Celebrating 50 Years of Advancing Justice

### Listen. Engage. Advocate

"I'm here to state unequivocally that one's marital status should never define one's ability to control their own bodily autonomy."

This was the opening for the WLC's testimony this week before the House Judiciary Committee on [HB153](#) - Criminal Law - Sexual Crimes - Repeal of Spousal Defense, a bill aimed at ensuring that married individuals have the same rights and protections as unmarried people when it comes to sexual assault.

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.

The House passed this bill last year and we hope will do so again this year. All eyes now turn to the Senate Judicial Proceedings where the bill hearing will be held on Tuesday. We will keep you updated on when committees expect to vote on this important legislation. You can see WLC Executive Director Michelle Siri's testimony below, read our full written testimony [here](#), and to view the entire bill hearing, go [here](#) and [here](#).



Another critical bill that has already been heard this session, and needs your support, is [SB 31 - Public Information Act – Inspection of Records From Body-Worn Digital Recording Devices](#), which would deny inspection or copying of the part of a body-worn camera recording that depicts victims of intimate partner violence or sexual assault. While the WLC fully supports transparency and accountability in government, we have seen first hand how damaging, scary, and dangerous allowing unfettered access to body-worn camera footage can be. It has been our experience that abusers are able to access those videos and use them as yet another source of abuse and intimidation. This legislation strikes the balance between transparency and victim safety. You can read our full written testimony [here](#).

As always, we will be back on Monday with a preview of what bills will be heard - but wanted to draw special attention to these two bills as they will have a direct impact on the lives of our clients and other survivors across the state. Thank you for being advocates with us!

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 [42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Women's Legislative Briefing](#), hosted by the [Montgomery County Commission for Women](#), will be held virtually on Sunday, January 30<sup>th</sup> 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 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.*

