



Celebrating 50 Years of Advancing Justice

Listen. Engage. Advocate

Dear friend of the WLC,

I am happy to report that the Senate Finance Committee voted [SB890 – the Abortion Care Access Act](#) – out of Committee. That means it is being heard on the Senate floor TOMORROW morning!

Some good news to start off the week!

Federal Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funding supports services for crime victims all across the state of Maryland. Funds are used for services such as counseling, advocacy, domestic violence shelters, child advocacy centers, support for rape victims at the hospital, and victim-witness support in court. While federal funding had been secured in future years for these life-saving services, there remained a temporary gap that needed to be filled by the State. That gap created looming budget cuts to services like those provided by the WLC and would create a crisis for survivors seeking assistance.

We are very happy to share that the Governor has committed \$35 million in supplemental budget dollars to bridge the VOCA gap and keep victim service providers funded in the upcoming fiscal year. The General Assembly had already "fenced off" \$20 million dollars in the state's budget to backfill VOCA, which meant those funds could not be spent on anything else, but could not mandate the spending. Adding that \$20 million, plus an additional \$15 million provides enough funding to ensure service providers do not have to cut staff and survivors will be able to receive the services they need.

We are incredibly grateful to the advocacy of our sister-agencies, the [Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#) for leading the campaign and the [Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence for representing service](#) providers across the state. And many thanks to all of you who joined us on social media and in reaching out to legislators and the Governor to make this happen!

More Cross Over Bills Being Heard This Week

As we inch closer to the end of session, we continue to have cross-over hearings scheduled for bills that have already passed out of their originating chamber. For some pieces of legislation, that had a cross-file that was passed out of the opposite chamber in the same form, these hearings are fairly pro-forma. But if a bill didn't have a cross-file, this will be the first opportunity for the opposing chamber to hear it and so a lot is at stake. Similarly, for bills that were heard in the opposite chamber and were either not voted out favorably or were voted out in a substantially different posture, this is an opportunity to try and get the bill back on track or work out compromise amendments.

Tuesday, March 29th

[HB496 - Labor and Employment - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment](#) (Senate Finance Committee) – The Senate version of the Time to Care Act mandates the immediate creation of a Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program, while the House version was amended to create another study before enabling a leave program. So it will be interesting to see how the Senate Finance Committee responds to the House version that is so drastically different from what the Senate has already passed.

[HB833 - Criminal Law - Victims of Child Sex Trafficking - Safe Harbor and Service Response](#) (Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee) – This bill will extend the protections available to child sex trafficking victims first established by the Child Sex Trafficking Screening and Services Act of 2019 by providing an exit ramp out of the juvenile legal system for child sex trafficking victims charged with prostitution and other related crimes. If enacted, this law would protect, instead of criminalize, children who are victims of human trafficking, and provides them with the specialized services they so desperately need. The Senate version was never voted on in Committee.

[SB450 - Harassment and Sexual Harassment - Definitions - Employment](#)

[Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Prevention Training](#) (House Economic Matters Committee) – while this important bill, that eases incredibly burdensome standards of proof for survivors of workplace harassment, has a House cross-file, [HB1393](#), that version of the bill was filed late and was subsequently never voted out of the House Rules Committee. As such, this is the first time the House Economic Matters Committee will hear the bill. Thankfully, the Committee heard the bill last session and voted it out favorably. It is our hope that the Committee will do the same again, and quickly, thus enabling ample time for the House floor vote.

Wednesday, March 30th

[HB1171 – Declaration of Rights – Right to Reproductive Liberty](#) (Senate Finance Committee) – We are incredibly grateful to House leadership for prioritizing access to reproductive health care this session. This Bill, which would create a ballot referendum to ask voters whether to enshrine our rights to reproductive liberty via a constitutional amendment in the November elections. [The Senate leadership is focusing its support on the Abortion Care Access Act, an equally important piece of legislation that will remove barriers to abortion care services](#), and as such it is not expected to move this bill out. But this will be our opportunity to convince them otherwise.

CALL TO ACTION

[HB 639 - Family Law - Grounds for Divorce](#) was heard in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee last week and those senators now need to hear from you! This bill would update and greatly simplify our grounds for divorce in the state. It would allow people to seek the help from the court they need to move forward in their lives, without depleting their assets and delaying obtaining relief. 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. It would eliminate arcane and long unused grounds for divorce and create a new ground - irreconcilable differences - a ground that 39 other states have already.

Please contact members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee and ask them to SUPPORT HB 639 - Grounds for Divorce:

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--------------|
| William Smith (chair) | will.smith@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3634 |
| Jeff Waldstreicher (vice chair) | jeff.waldstreicher@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3137 |
| Michael Hough | michael.hough@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3704 |
| Susan Lee (Maj Whip) | susan.lee@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3124 |
| Jack Bailey | jack.bailey@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3673 |
| Jill Carter | jill.carter@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3697 |
| Robert Cassilly | Bob.Cassilly@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3158 |
| Shelly Hettleman | Shelly.hettleman@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3131 |
| Charles Sydnor | charles.sydnor@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3612 |
| Ron Watson | ron.watson@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3631 |
| Chris West | chris.west@senate.state.md.us | 410-841-3648 |

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!](#) And if this email was forwarded to you by a friend, make sure to sign up for our legislative alerts [here!](#)

P.P.S. **Save the Date for the WLC's 50th Anniversary Celebration and Awards Ceremony on May 19th, 6pm, at Live! Casino & Hotel!** Join us in presenting the 50th Anniversary Legacy of Leadership Award to The Honorable Mary Ellen Barbera, Chief Judge (Ret.), Court of Appeals of Maryland; the 50th Anniversary Power of the Present Award to The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones, Speaker, The Maryland House of Delegates; and the 50th Anniversary Foundation of the Future Award, to Susan Francis, Executive Director, Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service. For more information or to buy tickets, click [HERE](#).

P.P.P.S. Join our friends and colleagues at [Maryland Volunteer Lawyers](#)

[Service](#) for their annual [A Taste for Pro Bono](#) on April 27, 2022 at 6pm at the Baltimore Museum of Industry.

P.P.P.P.S. Join reproductive rights advocates the very next night for [Planned Parenthood of Maryland's Spring Gala](#) at the American Visionary Art Museum at 6:30pm.

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.

