



Women's Law Center of Maryland

Celebrating 50 Years of Advancing Justice

Dear Jessica,

Good morning and happy Monday! This week marks the second full week of the legislative session, and bills are dropping at an increasingly faster rate and committees are moving full speed ahead with hearings. We have a full slate of hearings this week, covering everything from funding for victim services, to the requirement to surrender firearms when a final protective order is issued, to legislation that will allow mothers and families to utilize SNAP and WIC benefits to purchase essential diapers and menstrual hygiene products.

Last week saw the first bill hearings being conducted and the WLC was there in the House Judiciary committee to support legislation in its fifth year of attempting to get rid of Maryland law that allows marriage to serve as a defense to certain sexual assaults. Our intrepid legislative intern did an amazing job representing the WLC at the hearing and we are proud to continue standing with advocates and legislators in this fight.



Other bills coming up this week include:

Tuesday, January 24th

[HB16 - Primary and Secondary Education – Title IX – Notice \(Hear Our Voices Act\)](#)

Sponsor: Delegate J. Lewis (Ways & Means Committee)

[HB87 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs - Waiver - Diapers and Menstrual Hygiene Products](#)

Sponsor: Delegate Stewart (Appropriations Committee)

Wednesday, January 25th

[HB3 - Maryland State Police Gun Center – Firearms Surrendered Under Final Protective Orders](#)

Sponsor: Delegate Bartlett (Judiciary Committee)

This bill seeks to address a concern that domestic violence advocates have

long held that respondents in final protective orders are not surrendering all of their firearms as required to do by law. Protective orders are one of the most important tools that victims of domestic violence use to enhance their safety. Every final protective order requires the respondent to surrender their firearms to law enforcement. This bill would not change any of the existing laws regarding who, how, or when firearms are surrendered after the issuance of a final protective order.

House Bill 3 simply establishes a tracking mechanism to enable law enforcement to determine whether our current system of protective order gun surrendering is effective. If enacted, this bill will give us data about whether Maryland is effectively getting firearms out of the hands of respondents in final protective orders. We cannot address what we do not know, and this bill will give us the information necessary to determine if further changes are needed.

[HB129 - Courts - Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation](#)

Sponsor: Delegate Rosenberg (Judiciary Committee)

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.

[SB148 - Victim Services Programs - Supplementing Federal Funding and Support \(Victim Services Stabilization Act\)](#)

Sponsor: Senator Guzzone (Budget & Taxation Committee)

SB148 specifically addresses challenges victim services providers experience regarding federal funds administered by the State. 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. The WLC depends on VOCA funds to provide free attorneys to survivors of domestic violence in family law and immigration matters. Yet on-going challenges with funding and the inconsistent administration of the grants has put organizations that rely on VOCA funding in precarious positions. This legislation will ensure state funds to compensate for VOCA shortages and provide structural improvements to the administration of the grants.

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. With their help, and yours, we will stabilize the funding situation and ensure that input from victim service providers are taken into consideration.

Thursday, January 26th

[HB14 - Family Law – Grounds for Divorce](#)

Sponsor: Delegate Atterbeary (Judiciary Committee)

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.

We will keep you updated on these hearings, and more, including letting you know who and when to contact to make your voice heard.

Onward,



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 Annual Celebration and Awards Ceremony on May 3rd at 6pm at Citron! Join us in presenting the Rosalyn B. Bell Award to Marla Zide, Esq.; the Dorothy Beatty Memorial Award to Robyn Elliott; and the Access to Justice Award to Natasha M. Dartigue, Esq. and Debbie Feinstein, Esq. For more information or to buy tickets, click [HERE](#).

P.P.P.S. Save the date for these upcoming events from our partners and friends!

[Montgomery County Commission for Women's 43rd Annual Women's Legislative Briefing](#), Sunday, January 29th at 12:30pm on Zoom

[Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women's 2023 Legislative Briefing](#) - Wednesday, February 1st at 5pm on Zoom

[Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence Annual Memorial Service](#) - Tuesday, February 21st at 4pm on Zoom

The 2023 Gender Justice Rally will be held February 27th in Annapolis. More details to come!

Have an event you'd like to share with us? Send us an [email!](#)

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.



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