

## Celebrating 50 Years of Advancing Justice

Dear Jessica,

This week saw a variety of hearings that can help survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault, including a bill to ensure [high schools enact Title IX sexual misconduct policies](#) and another to ensure [victims who speak out aren't retaliated against in the courtroom](#). We also supported a bill to allow families to use SNAP and WIC benefits to buy essential items including diapers and menstrual products. None of these bills were groundbreaking sweeping legislation, yet they would have a huge impact on the lives of survivors.

Another small bill that could give us a lot of useful information in how to protect survivors is [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.

You can watch the bill hearing for HB3 below.



On the other hand, sometimes you need bigger changes to existing law, and [HB14 - Family Law – Grounds for Divorce](#) (Sponsor: Delegate Atterbeary (Judiciary Committee)) will bring much needed revisions to our existing family law infrastructure. This is not the first year this bill has been introduced, but hopefully the time is right for this update.

Finally, we continue to support our partners at MCASA and MNADV in the fight to ensure stable funding and efficient grant administration for victim-services organizations. While [SB148 - Victim Services Programs - Supplementing Federal Funding and Support \(Victim Services Stabilization Act\)](#) (Sponsor: Senator Guzzone (Budget & Taxation Committee)) might not be designed to help survivors directly, without the critical funding provided by VOCA and the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services, many organizations – including the WLC – would not be able to continue the important services that are so necessary for survivors to thrive.

Below we have links to allow you to email the legislators directly that need to hear from you on these bills. Don't forget to TAKE ACTION TODAY!

Onward,

Michelle Sini

## So what can you do?

**Contact members of the House Judiciary Committee this week and tell them to *vote favorably* on:**

HB3 - Maryland State Police Gun Center – Firearms Surrendered Under Final Protective Orders

HB 4 – Criminal Law – Sex Crimes – Repeal of Spousal Defense

HB14 - Family Law – Grounds for Divorce

HB129 - Courts - Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation

Send the Judiciary Committee an email [HERE](#).

**And don't forget about funding for victims services! Contact the Budget & Taxation Committee and ask them to *vote favorably* on:**

SB148 - Victim Services Programs - Supplementing Federal Funding and Support (Victim Services Stabilization Act)

Send the B&T Committee an email [HERE](#).

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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