



# Women's Law Center *of Maryland*

## 2026 MDGA Legislative Report

A core principle of the WLC's mission is to implement systemic change by influencing the passage of laws that impact women and their families in Maryland. WLC achieves this by actively monitoring legislation to identify relevant bills and then testifying when appropriate either for or against the proposed legislation. During the Maryland General Assembly (MDGA) legislative session this year, WLC monitored 187 pieces of legislation, provided written testimony on 71 bills, appeared in committee 8 times to provide in-person testimony, and sent out weekly legislative alerts and action items for 46 bills. Of the bills we supported this session, 47% passed.

WLC and its coalition of partners had several important victories, including a bill expanding temporary protective order terms from 7 days to 14 days to enable more time for survivors and their attorneys to prepare their cases, a bill prohibiting school resource officers from engaging in sexual activity with students at the school wherein they work, a bill strengthening the penalties for using deepfake technology against survivors, a bill that will make more trauma-informed human trafficking trainings available for survivor service providers, and more.



Below are bills that we supported that **passed** and will be enacted into law.

### **HB497/ SB0433 | Family Law - Temporary and Final Protective Orders - Duration and Relief**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Delegates Simpson, Stinnett, Simmons, Moreno, Taylor, Moon, and Woods

This bill will extend temporary orders from 7 days to 14 days, giving survivors a fairer amount of time for gathering evidence and preparing their cases for final protective order hearings, and to aid in the economic security of survivors by allowing courts to order reimbursement for financial losses caused by the respondent as a result of abuse.

### **SB0169/HB0372 | Hospitals - Emergency Pregnancy-Related Medical Conditions - Procedures**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Delegate Lopez

This bill will strengthen emergency care protections for pregnant patients in state law by codifying the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA), thereby ensuring that all Maryland hospitals must comply with emergency medical care for pregnant patients, including the termination of pregnancy when or if deemed medically necessary.

### **HB1357 | Consumer Protection - Menstrual Hygiene Products - Labeling Requirements**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Delegates Kaiser, Alston, Guyton, D. Jones, Kaufman, Lopez, Simmons, Wims, Bagnall, Cullison, Guzzone, Hill, Hutchinson, S. Johnson, Kipke, Martinez, Rosenberg, Ross, Taveras, White Holland, and Woorman

This bill will enable women to make informed decisions about their bodies by requiring menstrual hygiene product manufacturers to clearly list ingredients and to increase penalties for deceptive violations by manufacturers.

### **HB1490 | Family Investment Program - Temporary Cash Assistance - Good Cause and Adequate Reason Exceptions**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Delegates Shetty, Acevero, Cullison, Hill, D. Jones, Kaufman, Lehman, Lewis, McCaskill, Palakovich Carr, Ruff, Smith, Solomon, and Woods

This bill will protect survivors of intimate partner violence from financial control and unsafe child support enforcement requirements. The bill will prevent the Department of Human Services from penalizing TCA recipients who have good cause for not cooperating with child support, while clarifying and strengthening the determination process. It also makes the waiver process more accessible and safer by allowing self-attestation, eliminating third-party verification requirements, and protecting survivors from contact with abusive partners during review.

### **SB81/HB0329 | Criminal Law - School Resource Officers - Prohibition on Sexual Activity with Students**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senator Folden

The bill will make it a criminal offense for a school resource officer to engage in sexual activity, sexual contact, or vaginal intercourse with a student enrolled in a school where the officer is assigned. The bill is aimed at strengthening protections for students by specifically prohibiting such conduct by law enforcement officers in educational settings.

### **SB230/HB0138 | Criminal Law - Third-Degree Sexual Offense – Burglary**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senator West

This bill recognizes the severe harm that occurs when nonconsensual sexual contact is committed during a burglary by elevating the offense to a more serious classification. This change acknowledges that such acts compound trauma, as they violate both a person’s bodily autonomy and the safety of their home or protected space. Survivors often experience lasting psychological harm from these incidents, which involve heightened fear, loss of control, and a deep sense of violation. SB 230 appropriately reflects the gravity of this conduct and ensures accountability aligns with its impact. Its tiered registration requirements, based on the age of the survivor, also provide a measured approach that recognizes increased vulnerability among younger survivors. This bill represents an important step toward a justice system that more fully acknowledges and responds to the realities survivors face.

### **SB0294/HB0450 | Criminal Procedure - Protection of Identity of Victim of Sexual Assault or Stalking**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senator Love

This bill will extend privacy protections for minor victims of sexual assault to alleged victims of any age, including the right to have their identifying information redacted from an existing filing. This would protect survivors from further re-victimization that often occurs when they lose control of their very personal and painful story or when members of their community or the public at large blame, question, disbelieve or harass them.

### **SB0531/HB0491 | Criminal Procedure – Victims of Sexually Assaultive Behavior – Request for Verbal Acknowledgement**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senators Hettleman, Henson, West, and Love

This bill will address a procedural gap that can lead survivors to unintentionally limit investigations or waive future legal remedies while still in trauma. It will prohibit law enforcement from seeking verbal acknowledgments that absolve agencies of responsibility, closing a loophole that remains despite existing bans on written waivers. This change helps ensure survivors waive important rights before they have time to process their experience or consult an advocate.

### **SB465 | Criminal Procedure - Admission of Out-of-Court Statements - Assault in the Second Degree**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senators James and Ready

This bill will create a hearsay exception allowing certain statements to be admitted when a party has wrongfully caused a witness to become unavailable. This change is particularly important in domestic violence cases, where victims often face intimidation or threats that prevent them from safely testifying. The bill will help ensure that abusive parties cannot benefit from their own wrongdoing by silencing victims.

**SB417/HB45 | Labor and Employment - Mandatory Meetings on Religious or Political Matters - Employee Attendance and Participation (Maryland Worker Freedom Act)**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senator Lam

This bill will prohibit employers from requiring workers to attend captive audience meetings used to discourage unionization. The bill is supported because it promotes free and fair decision-making in union elections, consistent with democratic principles. Currently, employers can mandate attendance at anti-union meetings, while union organizers lack comparable access, resulting in a one-sided flow of information that can influence workers' choices. Unionization is an important tool for improving wages, benefits, and workplace protections, particularly for women. Research shows that women in unionized workplaces earn more, face a smaller gender pay gap, and have better access to benefits like paid leave and health insurance. Ensuring fair union elections will therefore advance both worker rights and gender equity in Maryland.

**SB0892/HB1121 | Health Occupations, Public Health, and Insurance - Menopause - Provider Training Coverage Requirements, Policy Initiatives, and Access to Care**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senators Gile, Beidle, Hester, King, Love, and Hettleman

This bill will support the integration of menopausal care into our healthcare system by encouraging and funding continuing education for health professionals, evaluating barriers to coverage of perimenopausal, menopausal, and postmenopausal treatment, and studying the impact of menopause on women's wellbeing.

**SB8/HB0184 | Criminal Law - Identity Fraud - Artificial Intelligence and Deepfake Representations**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senators Hester, Love, Hettleman, Smith, Waldstreicher, Charles, Folden, Henson, James, McKay, Muse, Sydnor, and West

This bill strengthens protections against identity theft and the growing misuse of deepfake technology. Rapid advances in artificial intelligence have made it easier for bad actors to steal identities, fabricate images, and spread harmful or false content that can severely impact victims. This issue is especially devastating for survivors of sexual assault and victims of revenge porn, whose images are often weaponized to further exploit, shame, or silence them. Deepfake technology can intensify that harm by

creating realistic nonconsensual sexual imagery, compounding trauma and making recovery and accountability even more difficult. The bill will give courts stronger tools to respond to these evolving threats and better protect Marylanders' reputations and financial security. As technology advances, legal protections must evolve as well to reflect the real and growing harms experienced by survivors.

#### **HB577/SB334 - Criminal Law - Firearm Crimes - Machine Gun Convertible Pistols**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senators Love, Smith, and Waldstreicher

This bill will target the growing use of handgun conversion devices, such as "Glock switches," by banning machine gun–convertible pistols and imposing strict penalties for possession or transfer. It also updates Maryland law to include modern rapid-fire activators, including untraceable and 3D-printed devices often used to bypass firearm regulations. Reducing access to these highly lethal modifications is essential, as firearms dramatically increase the risk of homicide in domestic violence situations and can escalate abuse into deadly encounters.

#### **SB187/HB0935 | Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female Incarcerated Individuals (Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senator M. Washington

This bill will end long-standing inequities in prerelease services for incarcerated women in Maryland. Since 2009, women in prerelease status have been denied access to equal housing, job training, and reentry support programs that are available to men, despite the proven role these services play in reducing recidivism and supporting family reunification. This gap has left many incarcerated women—most of whom are mothers—returning to their communities without stable housing, employment, or adequate support systems. Although the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act was passed in 2021, implementation has been delayed and the current state plan does not meet legal or practical needs. This bill will ensure sufficient facility size and require on-site, gender-responsive services that support safe and effective reentry for women.

#### **SB221/HB0670 | Criminal Law - Child Pornography - Prohibitions and Penalties**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senator James

This bill will increase penalties for possession of child sexual abuse material, particularly when the victim is under 13 or when large numbers of images are involved. The bill also clarifies how video content is counted and strengthens sentencing options for more serious offenses. Child sexual abuse material causes ongoing harm, as victims are repeatedly traumatized each time their abuse is shared or viewed online. Current Maryland law treats possession as a misdemeanor, but this bill will increase penalties to better reflect the severity of these crimes and the vulnerability of young children. The bill aligns with

existing state laws that recognize children under 13 as especially vulnerable and supports stronger accountability for those who contribute to the exploitation and circulation of this material.

### **HB771 | Health Occupations - Human Trafficking Awareness Training**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Delegates Miller, Alston, Cullison, Guzzone, Hill, Lopez, McComas, Reilly, Rose, Turner, White Holland, Woorman, Bagnall, Hutchinson, S. Johnson, Kaufman, Kipke, Martinez, Rosenberg, Ross, and Taveras

This bill will require health occupations boards to offer continuing education credit for a one-hour, no-cost human trafficking awareness training approved by the Department of Health and informed by the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force and survivor service providers. The training would cover topics such as identifying trafficking, trauma-informed care, screening protocols, and legal reporting requirements. Given Maryland's role as a trafficking corridor along Interstate 95, victims—including minors—are likely to encounter healthcare providers while in transit with signs of exploitation or injury. Including child abuse training would better equip providers to identify overlapping indicators, respond appropriately, and ensure timely reporting and protection. This expanded program will improve provider readiness and strengthen safeguards for vulnerable children.

### **SB245/HB444 | Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement Agreements – Prohibition**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senators Smith, Ferguson, and Lewis Young

This bill will phase out and prohibit 287(g) agreements in Maryland, which currently allow local law enforcement to collaborate with ICE on immigration enforcement. The bill responds to concerns about the expansion of ICE activity and its impacts on communities across the state. It highlights how increased immigration enforcement can lead to family separation and create fear, stress, and trauma, particularly for women and children. By ending these agreements, the legislation will reduce local involvement in federal deportation efforts and help protect family unity in Maryland.

### **SB0512 | Criminal Law - Stalking - Penalties**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senator Smith

This bill will increase the penalties for stalking to a period of imprisonment of up to 10 years or a fine of up to \$10,000 or both if the victim had a protective order in effect against the defendant at the time of the offense or the defendant had previously been convicted of stalking.

### **SB0532/HB1076 | Higher Education Institutions - Over-the-Counter Contraception - Access and Reporting**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senators Kagan and Feldman

This bill will provide two clarifications to Maryland law: 1) 4-year schools will be required to report annually on the program to the Maryland Higher Education Commission, just as community colleges are required to report; and 2) the requirement for access to over-the-counter contraception on community colleges is for all methods, just as is required for 4-year schools.

### SB791/HB1575 | Community Trust Act

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Senator Lam

SB791 reflects Maryland’s commitment to fairness, dignity, and justice for all. The bill makes clear that our state should not erode public trust or allow individuals to be subjected to federal immigration enforcement without due process. Instead, it reinforces Maryland’s focus on community safety, equal treatment, and protecting constitutional rights by barring the detention of individuals without a judicial warrant. Informal cooperation between local law enforcement and ICE—such as detaining or transferring individuals without judicial authorization—undermines these fundamental principles. Further, when local law enforcement engages in informal collaboration with ICE—detaining or transferring individuals without judicial authorization—it creates a climate of fear that can deter foreign-born survivors of abuse from seeking help. Survivors may be less likely to report violence, access services, or cooperate with law enforcement if they fear immigration consequences, ultimately making communities less safe.

### HB457 | Menstrual hygiene products in higher education

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Passed

**Sponsors:** Delegates Feldmark, Allen, Coley, Embry, Fair, Guzzone, Hill, Ivey, D. Jones, Lehman, Palakovich Carr, Ross, Ruth, Terrasa, and Ziegler

Requiring products to be provided at no cost will be essential, as even minimal out-of-pocket expenses can pose barriers for students already managing tuition, housing, transportation, and food costs. Making these products available in restrooms will help normalize menstruation as a routine biological function and reduce stigma, aligning campus policies with public health best practices. This legislation will serve not only as a gender equity measure, but also as a public health and economic investment. By helping students stay in class, focused, and engaged without disruption from an unmet basic health need, it will support Maryland’s students.



Below are bills that the Women’s Law Center supported but **did not pass**. While not successful this year, WLC and our coalition partners stay determined to reintroduce important pieces of legislation to the 2027 General Assembly, such as a bill to enforce the surrender of firearms immediately after a protective order judgement, a bill to expand definitions and protections for hate bias incidents and crimes, and a bill to expand coverage for certain domestic violence-related injuries. Now until the next MDGA session, WLC will meet with advocates and legislators to continue fighting for these bills to work towards passage in 2027.

### **SB20/HB83 | Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Did not pass

**Sponsors:** Senator Hettleman

This bill would have provided a mechanism for the enforcement of the surrendering of firearms from a respondent after a Final Protective Order has been issued. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and gun violence are inextricably linked. This bill would provide law enforcement with procedures to follow when an abuser has not surrendered firearms in accordance with the law.

### **SB295 | Civil Actions - Immunity - Disclosure of Allegations of Sexually Assaultive Behavior (Stop Silencing Survivors Act)**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Did not pass

**Sponsors:** Senators Love, Gile, and Hettleman

This bill would have protected survivors against retaliation through defamation suits, establish legal immunity for survivors who, acting in good faith, disclose information about sexual assault, and ensure that courts provide reasonable attorney's fees and costs in certain circumstances related to good-faith disclosures.

### **SB661 | Wiretapping and Electronic Surveillance - Intercepted Communications - Admissibility of Evidence**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Did not pass

**Sponsors:** Senators Love, Charles, Henson, McKay, Smith, Sydnor, Waldstreicher, West, Folden, James, and Muse

This bill would have allowed courts to admit certain recorded wire, oral, or electronic communications—such as recordings made by survivors of intimate partner violence—when a judge finds they are material, highly probative, and not connected to a law enforcement investigation. Under current law, survivors who record their own abuse risk felony prosecution, and courts are often prevented from

considering powerful evidence that could corroborate threats or assaults. This bill took a balanced approach by requiring advance notice to the opposing party and judicial findings on relevance and probative value, rather than creating automatic admissibility. The bill also would have reduced violations of the wiretap statute from a felony to a misdemeanor, helping to mitigate the disproportionate harm survivors face when trying to document abuse for their own protection.

#### **SB626/HB1589 | Sex Designation on Certificates of Birth, Licenses, and Identification Cards and Birth Information Histories (Birth Certificate Modernization Act)**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Did not pass

**Sponsors:** Senator Lam

This bill would have allowed individuals to update their sex designation on birth certificates and state-issued identification in a way that reflects their self-identified gender, reducing the risk of discrimination, harassment, and legal harm. The bill also recognized non-binary and gender-expansive identities by expanding designation options on state identification. To address potential conflicts with federal requirements, WLC proposed an amendment allowing individuals to complete a DS-10 Birth Affidavit when federal law imposes specific sex designation criteria. This bill would have been critical step in protecting Marylanders' rights regardless of shifting federal policies.

#### **SB49/HB104 | Unhoused Individuals - Rights and Affirmative Defense**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Did not pass

**Sponsors:** Delegate Mireku-North

This bill would have prevented the criminalization of people for engaging in basic survival activities, a practice that is both unjust and counterproductive, often worsening long-term stability. Many women, particularly those who are Black, immigrant, disabled, elderly, or transgender, face heightened vulnerability and are often forced to choose between unsafe housing situations and life on the streets. While the bill would not have resolved the state's housing crisis—marked by shrinking public housing and limited access to vouchers—it would have provided important protections for individuals who lack safe shelter options.

#### **HB513 | Hate Crimes and Hate Bias - Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Did not pass

**Sponsors:** Delegate Vogel

While the Maryland State Police have collected reports of hate bias incidents since at least 1987, there is currently no definition of a "hate bias incident" in Maryland Public Safety Code § 2-307(b). Instead, the statute requires law enforcement to report incidents "apparently directed against an individual or group" based on certain protected characteristics, without further guidance. This lack of definition creates confusion and inconsistency in how incidents are identified, reported, and addressed, contributing to underreporting and uneven implementation of the law. This bill would have updated the

definition of sexual orientation in Maryland Criminal Law Code § 10-301. The current definition relies on a limited list of examples—such as homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality—and excludes many sexual orientations, including asexual and pansexual identities. It also fails to account for intersex and nonbinary individuals who may not fall within “male or female” categorizations. By replacing this narrow list with a clear and inclusive definition, HB 513 would have modernized the statute to reflect current understandings of sexual orientation and recognized that language and identity evolve over time.

#### **HB1209/SB0950 | Conversion Therapy - Prohibitions and Causes of Action**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Did not pass

**Sponsors:** Delegates Cullison, Acevero, Behler, Clippinger, Fair, Kaiser, Martinez, Vogel, and Woorman

This bill would have enabled Maryland survivors of youth conversion therapy to seek justice in adulthood by extending the timeframe to file a civil suit and to explicitly recognize mental harm created by conversion therapy. In 2018, the Maryland General Assembly banned conversion therapy for youth because of the substantial evidence of harm caused to Marylanders. Survivors may not have the support until adulthood to address the trauma caused by conversion therapy.

#### **HB1107/SB0950 | Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance - Required Coverage for Aesthetic Services and Restorative Care for Victims of Domestic Violence (Healing Our Scars Act)**

**Position:** Support

**Outcome:** Did not pass

**Sponsors:** Delegates Cullison, Acevero, Behler, Clippinger, Fair, Kaiser, Martinez, Vogel, and Woorman

This bill would have required the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and certain insurers, nonprofit health service plans, health maintenance organizations, and managed care organizations to provide coverage to victims of domestic violence for aesthetic services and restorative care related to scars or scarring determined to be medically necessary for the treatment of physical injuries caused by domestic violence.

#### **HB309 | Judicial Facilities - Stops, Detentions, and Arrests - Limitations**

**Position:** Support - priority

**Outcome:** Did not pass

**Sponsors:** Delegate Stewart

This bill would have placed limits on when and how individuals can be stopped, detained, or arrested in or near judicial facilities. The bill generally prohibits stops, detentions, or arrests for certain civil offenses while a person is in a courthouse or traveling within one mile of a judicial facility to attend official proceedings, unless specific notice and conditions are met. It also would require that immigration enforcement actions not interfere with access to the courts or disrupt proceedings. If these restrictions were violated, any resulting evidence would be inadmissible in court, and affected individuals could bring civil lawsuits for damages and injunctive relief. This bill would have protected access to justice and prevented law enforcement actions that could discourage people from attending court-related proceedings.