



Marjorie Cook Foundation
Domestic Violence Legal Clinic

2201 Argonne Drive • Baltimore, Maryland 21218 • 410-554-8463 • dlennig@hruthmd.org

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HOUSE BILL 1178

March 10, 2022

DOROTHY J. LENNIG, LEGAL CLINIC DIRECTOR

House of Ruth is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House Bill 1178 adds coercive control to the list of acts of abuse in peace orders and protective orders. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 1178.**

House of Ruth recognizes the horror of coercive control. Many domestic violence survivors find coercive control, which can include emotional abuse, degradation, intimidation, isolating a victim from family and friends, and controlling a victim's finances, to name a few, more damaging than the physical abuse. House of Ruth works with countless survivors of coercive control, many of whom report that they experience physical violence a few times a year, but are subjected to coercive control on a daily basis.

HB 1178 raises the question of whether coercive control should be among the list of acts of abuse that invokes the extraordinary remedy of a protective order. Protective orders are one of the few court actions that a petitioner can file *ex parte* and receive an immediate order. The relief offered in a protective order is also extraordinary and can include vacating a respondent from the house, granting a petitioner immediate custody of minor children, and order a respondent to surrender firearms. The protective order is designed to protect victims from physical danger.

House of Ruth believes that coercive control is a terrifying constellation of behaviors that abusers use to terrorize and control their victims and supports finding ways to end coercive control. However, we do not believe it should be added to the definition of acts of abuse in the protective order statute.

The Standing Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure is currently drafting a definition of coercive control. If the General Assembly is inclined to add coercive control to the protective order statute, House of Ruth suggests using the same definition as the Rules Committee. When the Rules Committee discussed the definition of coercive control, it purposely drafted the definition to describe behavior that did not rise to the level of acts of physical violence and distinguished coercive control from the acts enumerated in the protective order statute.

House of Ruth urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 1178.