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Bill No: **HB0296** (SB0280)

Title: **Interim and Temporary Protective Orders - Electronic Filing and Video Conferencing Hearings**

Committee: **Judiciary**

Hearing Date: **2/3/22**

Position: **SUPPORT**

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Business and Professional Women of Maryland (BPW/MD) is a non-partisan, non-sectarian, member-supported nonprofit focused on eliminating gender discrimination in employment, the principle of equal pay, and the need for a comprehensive equal rights amendment to protect women's civil rights. Our mission is advanced through legislative advocacy, professional development, and public education. Founded in 1929, BPW/MD has advocated for equality legislation at both the national and state level.

As an association of pro-equality citizens and a partner of pro-equality organizations, BPW/MD fully supports HB 296 and the protections it offers women. Women were the victims in an average of 74% of the Final Protection Order hearings in Maryland in 2021<sup>1</sup>, and research has shown that women are also the majority of victims in instances of sexual assault.<sup>2</sup> Forcing already-victimized women to leave the safety of a hospital to obtain a protective order further endangers them. A victim may lack safe transportation, be physically unwell/injured, or still be experiencing the trauma that required medical care in the first place; their abuser might even be sitting in the waiting room.

Healthcare settings play a critical role in identifying domestic violence and assisting victims before they suffer further injuries or even death. Maryland hospitals already screen for domestic violence, and victims of sexual assault must visit a hospital to obtain a SAFE exam. A study of femicide showed that 41% of victims sought health care for physical injury or mental health issues before they were killed by their intimate partner.<sup>3</sup> Enabling women to electronically file for a protective order from a hospital would help maintain their safety and potentially save lives.

Several other states already accept electronic petitions for protective orders; in Maryland, the technology exists and courts have conducted virtual hearings throughout the pandemic. For these reasons, BPW/MD urges a favorable report with sponsor amendments on HB 296.

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<sup>1</sup> "Domestic Violence Monthly Reports." *Maryland Courts*, 2021, <https://www.courts.state.md.us/eservices/dvmonthlypublicreports>.

<sup>2</sup> Rennison, C. A. (2002). Rape and sexual assault: Reporting to police and medical attention, 1992-2000 [NCJ 194530]. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistic

<sup>3</sup> Phyllis W. Sharps, Jane Koziol-McLain, Jacquelyn Campbell, Judith McFarlane, Carolyn Sachs, Xiao Xu, Health Care Providers, #39; Missed Opportunities for Preventing Femicide, *Preventive Medicine*, Volume 33, Issue 5, 2001, Pages 373-380.