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SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS FOR HOUSE BILL 296

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House of Ruth Maryland is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal representation to victims of domestic violence throughout the State. House Bill 296 would allow a protective order petitioner receiving medical treatment at a hospital to electronically file a petition for an interim or temporary protective order and require the court to hold the hearing through video conferencing. **House of Ruth urges the House Judiciary Committee to amend HB 296 and issue a favorable report.**

House of Ruth fully supports the concept of allowing a survivor who is hospitalized as a result of an incident of domestic violence to be able to access a protective order remotely. We are concerned that HB 296, as written, would not work procedurally as currently there is no way to alert a court commissioner that a petitioner wants to file an interim protective order during nights and weekends. If the legislature is inclined to pass HB 296, House of Ruth suggests limiting the scope to temporary protective orders when the District Court is open. This would allow the petitioner to call the court to alert them that s/he is filing.

In addition, House of Ruth urges the House Judiciary Committee to strike page 2, lines 11 through 15, as we believe a hospital should not be able to decide whether a survivor should be allowed to obtain a protective order remotely.

Finally, while House of Ruth strongly supports enabling hospitalized survivors to obtain a temporary protective order remotely, we believe it is also important to connect survivors to domestic violence services. Domestic violence service providers throughout the State provide survivors with information, referrals, counseling, legal representation, lethality assessment and safety planning. Petitioners who file remotely are more likely to miss an opportunity to connect to these services. House of Ruth encourages the hospitals to connect domestic survivors to domestic violence service providers, both in-house and local, so that survivors not only obtain protective orders, but also receive other lifesaving services, including representation at the final protective order hearing.

The House of Ruth urges the House Judiciary Committee to amend HB 296 and report favorably.