



**House of Ruth
Maryland**

Domestic Violence Legal Clinic

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Bill No.: House Bill 553
Bill Title: Family Law – Fundamental Parental Rights
Committee: Judiciary
Hearing Date: February 15, 2024
Position: **UNF**

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 of Ruth has offices in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Prince George’s County, and Montgomery County. House Bill 553 would create a fundamental parental right to direct the upbringing of their children absent a showing of clear and convincing evidence to the contrary. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to report unfavorably on House Bill 553.**

Under current law, courts must make decisions about child custody and visitation based on the best interests of the child and an individualized assessment of the needs of the child and family. HB 553 would do away with this standard and elevate the rights of the parents above that of the child. HB 553 presumes that most families function in a similar way; this is simply not the case. Each child, each family, each situation needs to be judged on its own merits and decided based on its own needs and resources. One size does not fit all when it comes to decisions regarding the welfare of children.

The House of Ruth urges the House Judiciary Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 553.