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Environment and Transportation
Committee

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Sponsor Testimony

HB 1440 – Courts – Parental Accommodations

Judicial Proceedings Committee

26 March 2025

Thank you, Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee. I am Delegate Robbyn Lewis, here to present House Bill 1440, a bill that improves accommodations for breastfeeding parents and caregivers of small children within Maryland’s judicial system.

This bill requires that any circuit courthouse constructed or undergoing a major renovation on or after October 1, 2025, must include a private lactation room. This room must be available to both courthouse employees and members of the public. It must include a chair and table, a nearby electrical outlet to accommodate breast pumps, a sink, a refrigerator, and a door that locks from the inside to ensure privacy. This is a basic, practical accommodation that acknowledges the needs of nursing mothers and allows them to participate in public life without sacrificing their health or their children’s well-being.

Secondly, the bill expands the grounds for excusal from jury duty. Current law allows excusal due to extreme inconvenience, undue hardship, or public necessity. HB1440 adds two additional grounds: being a breastfeeding mother and having legal custody of and personal responsibility for a child under the age of three who requires continuous care during normal court hours. These changes bring our code into alignment with the lived realities of many Maryland families and affirm that caring for young children is a serious responsibility that deserves accommodation.

Finally, to ensure transparency and consistency in the implementation of these new excusal options, the bill also requires the Maryland Judiciary to collect and report annual data on excusal requests and outcomes. The report must include the number of requests, the number granted or denied and disaggregate the information by jurisdiction and the type of excusal requested.

Like many important legislative efforts, this bill was inspired by a constituent. Rachel Wagner, a resident of District 46, reached out to me and my colleagues after experiencing firsthand the challenges posed by Maryland’s current jury service system. Her story is not unique. Across the state, parents, especially mothers, are struggling to balance civic obligations with the demands of early parenthood. House Bill 1440 is a thoughtful, modest step toward meeting them where they are.

Given the childcare challenges faced by so many Maryland families, this bill is both practical and necessary. It helps strike a fairer balance between civic engagement and family life. Other states have already moved in this direction. Twenty-two states, including California, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and Virginia, already allow breastfeeding mothers to be excused from jury duty. States like California and Florida also require courthouses to provide public lactation rooms. Maryland should follow these best practices and demonstrate that our state supports all citizens in fulfilling both their civic duties and family responsibilities.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1440. Thank you for your time and consideration.