

# Maryland Commission for Women

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## **HB536 Employment Discrimination- Reasonable Accommodations – Disabilities Due to Childbirth, Menopause, and Related Medical Conditions**

**SPONSOR:** Delegate Stephanie Smith

**HEARING:** February 12, 2026

**POSITION:** SUPPORT

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr and Members of the Government, Labor and Elections Committee,

The Maryland Commission for Women urges a **FAVORABLE** report on **HB536 Employment Discrimination- Reasonable Accommodations – Disabilities Due to Childbirth, Menopause, and Related Medical Conditions**. We thank sponsor Delegate Stephanie Smith for her leadership introducing this legislation.

After hearing from women across the state, the Maryland Commission for Women has identified advancing policy around menopause as our top legislative priority this year. Ensuring workplace protections is one essential element of this work. These protections work hand in hand with increasing access to care and improved awareness and clinical training to improve health and economic security outcomes for women during perimenopause and menopause.

In June 2025, Rhode Island became the first state to expand workplace anti-discriminations protections to include menopause and perimenopause related conditions. The city of Philadelphia followed in November 2025. Maryland, long a leader in women's health and economic empowerment, should join these leaders in enacting similar protections. Doing so would help protect valuable female workers, contribute to essential public education and visibility around menopause, and reduce stigma around a normal experience for more than half the population.

### **Why is Menopause a Workplace Issue?**

The workforce participation rates for older women are rising rapidly, and public policy has not yet caught up. According to the US Department of Labor Women's Bureau, since 1980 the labor force participation rate for women ages 55 to 64 has increased from 42% to 62%.

According to the 9/25 Rand report ***The Economic Impacts of Menopause in the United States***, there is an urgent need for comprehensive policy responses that address both immediate symptom management and longer-term career sustainability for menopausal women.

- Their analysis estimates Maryland has 508,287 women working between ages 45-60.
- In 2023, approximately 30 percent of women in the labor force were in the age range corresponding with the menopause transition.
- **Health care (31%) and education (35%)** had the most working women potentially experiencing the menopausal transition based on age.
- Although research is limited, some evidence suggests that roughly one-third of women have considered leaving or have left the workforce due to menopause symptoms, with disproportionate impacts on women in senior-level positions.<sup>1</sup>

### **Who is Most in Need of Workplace Protections?**

- The effects of menopause symptoms in the workplace are especially pronounced among women in manual, routine-intensive, and caregiving roles, as well as among women without a college degree.<sup>2</sup>
- Black, Hispanic and low-income women are more likely to experience earlier and more intense symptoms and are disproportionately affected by adverse work outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

### **Will Menopause Protections Help Close the Widening Pay Gap?**

Unfortunately, the wage gap between women and men is expanding for the first time in 60 years. After decades of narrowing, the pay gap widened in 2023 and 2024. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau found women in 2024 earning approximately 81 cents for every dollar men earned, down from 84 cents in 2022. The widening gap is particularly hitting women of color and mothers, according to the *Institute for Women's Policy Research*. This impacts not only women's annual earnings, but also their lifetime financial security and retirement readiness. The wage gap is complex and influenced by multiple factors. Workplace discrimination is one factor. Increased awareness of perimenopause and menopause combined with expanding protections for women experiencing symptoms could help Maryland counteract the national trends that contribute to the widening wage gap between women and men.

For all of these reasons, the Maryland Commission for Women urges a FAVORABLE report. For specific questions, please contact our Executive Director, Ariana Kelly, at [Ariana.Kelly@Maryland.Gov](mailto:Ariana.Kelly@Maryland.Gov) or via telephone at 240-338-0591.

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<sup>1</sup> Faubion SS, Enders F, Hedges MS, et al. Impact of Menopause Symptoms on Women in the Workplace. *Mayo Clinic proceedings*. 2023;98(6):833-845.

<sup>2</sup> O'Neill MT, Jones V, Reid A. Impact of menopausal symptoms on work and careers: a cross-sectional study. *Occup Med (Lond)*. 2023;73(6):332-338.

<sup>3</sup> Cortés YI, Marginean V. Key factors in menopause health disparities and inequities: Beyond race and ethnicity. *Current Opinion in Endocrine and Metabolic Research*. 2022;26:100389.