



Date: February 12, 2026

To: House Judiciary Committee

Reference: House Bill 497- Family Law-Temporary and Final Protective Orders-Duration and Relief

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Bartlett and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Center for Hope and the Dove Program at Northwest Hospital, we respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of HB 497. The Center for Hope and the Dove Program provide comprehensive services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence, including medical care, advocacy, counseling, and coordination with legal and community-based partners. We work closely with survivors during some of the most dangerous and destabilizing moments of their lives, including when they are seeking civil protection orders. HB 497 reflects the lived realities of survivors and would make Maryland's protection order process more effective, equitable, and trauma informed.

The would extend the time between a Temporary Order of Protection (TPO) hearing and the Final Protection Order (FPO) hearing from 7 days to 14 days. Maryland is currently out of step with much of the country in requiring such a compressed timeframe, and the proposed change would better align our law with practices in other states. The period immediately following the issuance of a TPO is often overwhelming for survivors. During this time, survivors may be:

- Seeking emergency or longer-term housing
- Obtaining medical care for themselves or their children, including treatment for physical injuries or mental health needs
- Applying for public benefits or emergency assistance
- Attempting to secure legal representation
- Maintaining employment or caring for children
- Managing trauma and the emotional impacts of disclosing abuse to family members or employers
- Engaging in safety planning,
- Navigating parallel criminal proceedings, when applicable

Expecting survivors to fully prepare for a contested court hearing within seven days, often without legal representation, is unrealistic and may place them at a disadvantage. Direct legal service providers consistently report that petitioners commonly seek legal assistance only days before their FPO hearing, leaving insufficient time for attorneys to gather evidence, interview witnesses, and prepare effective advocacy. As a result, survivors may be significantly compromised in court or forced to proceed unrepresented. Additionally, many FPO hearings are postponed due to delays in service of process.

While not the primary intent of this legislation, extending the hearing timeframe would allow law enforcement additional time to complete service and reduce unnecessary postponements. Importantly, if service is completed quickly, respondents would also benefit from having additional time to consult with counsel and prepare for court,



supporting fairness for all parties. HB 497 would also expand the relief available in a Final Protection Order by expressly authorizing courts to order reimbursement for financial losses incurred as a result of the respondent's acts.

Domestic violence service providers have repeatedly heard from judges that they feel constrained to order only the relief explicitly listed in statute. Many other states allow courts to order compensation for financial loss in protection orders, and Maryland should do the same. Survivors often incur immediate, tangible costs as a result of abuse, including:

- Damage to personal property
- Costs to repair or replace phones, which are frequently destroyed to isolate survivors
- Expenses related to safety, transportation, or emergency needs

Without this authority, survivors may be forced to wait months or years for relief through divorce proceedings or pursue small claims actions against their abuser, an option that is often unsafe, retraumatizing, and practically inaccessible. Allowing courts to address financial loss at the time of the FPO promotes accountability, supports survivor stability, and reduces unnecessary legal burdens.

The genesis of HB 497 underscores its importance. At a May 2025 Partners for Justice conference attended by legal service providers, attorneys, and advocates from across Maryland, participants were asked what changes would make the protection order system more responsive to survivors' needs.

This legislation directly reflects the consensus of professionals who work daily with survivors and understand the practical gaps in current law. HB 497 represents a thoughtful, survivor-centered improvement to Maryland's civil protection order statute. It acknowledges the complexity of survivors' lives, promotes fairness and preparedness in court proceedings, and provides meaningful relief that can support safety and stability.

For these reasons, the Center for Hope and the Dove Program at Northwest Hospital respectfully urge a **favorable report** on HB 497. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to protecting survivors of domestic violence.

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