



BILL NUMBER: HB 336

TITLE: Criminal Procedure – District Court Commissioners and False Statements

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

HEARING DATE: 2/3/2026

POSITION: UNF

TurnAround, Inc. is the designated rape crisis center for Baltimore City and Baltimore County and a comprehensive domestic violence service provider. Core components of the agency's work include crisis response, survivor-centered advocacy, legal referrals, trauma-informed therapy, and community education. TurnAround also serves as the Regional Navigator for Baltimore County and Howard County, providing specialized services to survivors of human trafficking. The organization is a member of the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA), the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV), and the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force (MHTTF).

House Bill 336 would prohibit District Court Commissioners from issuing arrest warrants initiated by individuals other than law enforcement officers or State's Attorneys. The bill would also increase the penalty for making a false statement or report to a governmental official or unit from six months to up to three years of imprisonment.

If enacted, this legislation would have devastating consequences for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Survivors need multiple pathways to safety, and access to District Court Commissioners is one such critical pathway. HB 336 would significantly limit this option and place survivors at increased risk of harm.

There are many reasons a survivor may seek assistance from a District Court Commissioner rather than directly from law enforcement. In some cases, an abuser prevents the survivor from contacting police. In others, law enforcement may decline to pursue charges—an unfortunate and well-documented reality in sexual assault cases. As a direct service provider, TurnAround routinely supports survivors in filing charges through the Commissioner's office following abusive incidents, often in conjunction with petitions for protective orders.

Recently, TurnAround assisted a survivor in pursuing charges through the Commissioner's office after her rape case had been declined for prosecution multiple times over a seven-year period. Her case was reopened and reinvestigated on several occasions, yet approval from the State's Attorney's Office was repeatedly denied. A national expert in sexual violence later reviewed the case and identified serious failures in investigative practices and prosecutorial standards, including unconstitutional racial discrimination, resulting in a profound injustice. Because a District Court Commissioner approved the charges, the case is now pending in District Court,

and the survivor is seeking review by a special prosecutor (See attached Baltimore Banner article).

Unfortunately, this case is not unique in Maryland. For many survivors, the District Court Commissioner is the only available avenue to pursue justice and safety. Allowing a person accused of rape or domestic violence to receive only a summons—thereby remaining free in the community and potentially continuing to terrorize victims—solely because of who initiated the charges is unconscionable.

Domestic violence and sexual assault are already significantly underreported. This legislation would further discourage reporting and remove an essential safeguard. District Court Commissioners are authorized to issue arrest warrants only when probable cause exists and when additional factors are met, including a determination that the defendant poses a danger to another person or to the community. Eliminating this authority would create serious and unnecessary risks for survivors.

The period when a survivor leaves an abusive relationship is widely recognized as the most dangerous time. Restricting Commissioners to issuing only summonses would alert abusers that a report has been made and that a criminal case is pending, without providing meaningful protection to the survivor. This could prevent survivors from reaching safety and expose them to retaliation and further violence.

For these reasons, TurnAround respectfully urges the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 336.

For further inquiries, please contact Amanda Rodriguez, Esq., Chief Executive Officer, at arodriguez@turnaroundinc.org, or Jean Henningsen, Chief Communications Officer, at jhenningsen@turnaroundinc.org.

Woman seeks charges in alleged 2018 Randallstown assault after years of refusals

Céilí Doyle

12/24/2025 9:07 a.m. EST, Updated 12/24/2025 9:27 a.m. EST



Shakura has been pushing to hold the man she alleges raped her in 2018 accountable. (Jessica Gallagher/The Banner)

Baltimore County District Court to appoint outside prosecutor or dismiss case

Deep in the Baltimore County District Court building in Towson, Shakura nervously tapped her heels on the linoleum floor.

Years of pain and anticipation led the former Baltimore County resident to this moment — her latest push to hold the man she alleges raped her in 2018



Would a District Court commissioner reopen her case? And, if so, would a judge agree to assign an outside prosecutor to try the man?

The answer? Yes. And, maybe.

Last week, a court commissioner charged Shakura's former Randallstown housemate with three counts of second-degree rape and second-degree assault and issued a warrant for his arrest.

Shakura said she spent the better part of the past decade pleading with the [Baltimore County State's Attorneys Office](#), county police detectives and even county officials to prosecute the man she says raped her three times in the summer of 2018. At Shakura's request, The Banner is using only her middle name because it does not identify survivors of sexual assault without their consent.

On Friday, county State's Attorney Scott Shellenberger and his deputy, John Cox, responded to the 44-year-old's efforts to hold the man accountable by asking the court to dismiss the case.

In a filing later that day, Shakura's attorney, [Robbie Leonard](#), requested the judge appoint a special prosecutor from outside Baltimore County to litigate the case. Leonard, who ran against Shellenberger in 2022, but is not next year, argued that neither the state's attorney nor his deputies could be trusted to prosecute the case on behalf of his client, a Black woman.

"[The office] has acted with **unconstitutional bias, inconsistent and shifting legal justifications**, and **professionally inappropriate conduct** in their refusal to prosecute the perpetrator of the Petitioner's rapes," he wrote, bolding some of the words.

On Saturday, [District Court Judge Dorothy Wilson](#) granted Shellenberger's request to dismiss and quashed the arrest warrant, but she reversed her decision Monday after reviewing Leonard's petition.

Court records now show that a hearing will be scheduled for Wilson to listen to both Leonard and Shellenberger before deciding.

"All of this is painful, of course," Shakura said. "But this is the greatest victory in seven and a half years of fighting for justice."





After reviewing Shakura's petition, a District Court judge is scheduled to listen to both Leonard and Shellenberger before deciding whether prosecution of the case. (Jessica Gallagher/The Banner)

How did we get here?

Anyone can [ask a District Court commissioner to charge someone](#) they say committed a crime.

The commissioner's lobby is similar to the Motor Vehicle Administration — down to the plastic blue chairs and bank teller-esque counter window.

On Thursday, Shakura raised her right hand there and swore she was telling the truth in her application to charge the man. Twenty minutes later a commissioner said the case was reopened.

Her advocate, [Amanda Rodriguez](#), CEO of the nonprofit TurnAround, which [assists survivors](#) of sexual and domestic violence and human trafficking, embraced Shakura.

"I'm in shock," Rodriguez said. "I mean, it's only been eight years."

In multiple interviews Shakura described how her former housemate raped her inside the Randallstown home where they rented separate rooms on June 19,



Initially, Shakura refused to move out, rationalizing in her traumatized state that leaving would grant him power.

“He already raped me and that was so humiliating and this was some random dude. He’s not my spouse or boyfriend ...,” Shakura said. “If I run away and move out, then I’m giving him even more power.”

She changed her mind after considering he could endanger others and reported the alleged rapes to Baltimore County police on July 22, 2018.

Police conducted an investigation, but Lisa Dever, then an assistant state’s attorney, declined to charge the man.

Shakura pressed her case, but Cox and Shellenberger also declined to charge the man over the next several years.

Shakura said that Shellenberger told her in a virtual meeting in September 2021 that he believed her, but could not offer more.

“He said: ‘I believe you, but a jury won’t,’” Shakura recalled.

In an interview with The Banner, Shellenberger said he did not want to address specifics because the case is pending.

During a Southwest Baltimore County Democratic Club town hall in May 2022, Shakura asked Shellenberger if he believed she was raped, according to the petition.

“I do not believe we can prove your case,” he told Shakura. “I do not believe the facts that you revealed the first time to the police amount to a crime in the state of Maryland.”





On Friday, county State's Attorney Scott Shellenberger and his deputy responded to Shakura's efforts to hold the man accountable by asking the court to dismiss the case. (Paul Newson/The Banner)

Two years later, John Magee, chief of the State's Attorney's Office's Child Abuse and Sex Offense Division negated that previous position and presented Shakura's case in July 2024 to a grand jury, which declined to indict the man.

"This lack of transparency, coupled with the office's contradictory statements, raises serious concerns about the good faith of the prosecution," Leonard wrote in his petition for outside counsel.

'Unconstitutional discrimination and bias'

Shakura said she believes Shellenberger's office would have treated a white woman differently.

In the petition, Leonard argues that the state's attorney's office violated his client's constitutional rights and discredited her during the grand jury proceedings.

"Lisa Dever, the first prosecutor to review the Petitioner's case, explained ... she could not prosecute due to her belief that a jury would not believe the Petitioner because she is a Black woman," wrote Leonard, [citing a Baltimore Sun article](#) from July 2022 in which Dever defended her actions.

Dever, whom Shellenberger promoted to the second-highest position in his office, told The Sun she once had a sexual assault case where a juror convinced the rest of the jury not to convict a Black man who reminded her of her son because “all Black women lie,” and the victim was a Black woman.

Dever said that shows how prosecutors’ must factor in jurors’ previous experiences.

“This rationale is fundamentally flawed,” Leonard wrote. “By her logic, if a prosecutor cannot prosecute a case without knowing jurors’ past experiences or what they will bring to a case, the prosecutor is unable to bring charges. *If this argument is true, no prosecutor could ever move forward on any case.*”

Shellenberger did not address Dever’s comments, but said multiple prosecutors in his office reviewed Shakura’s case and determined there was insufficient evidence to arrest the man.

“I believe we’ve made the right decisions throughout this case,” he said. “This office handles all their cases fairly and impartially, and that is what we did in this case.”

Shellenberger emphasized that Magee brought Shakura’s case in front of a grand jury, Shakura had the opportunity to testify and jurors decided not to charge.

Rodriguez, a former Baltimore County assistant state’s attorney, said it makes no sense that a grand jury didn’t indict because the evidence — including a witness statement from another housemate who overheard Shakura resist the man’s advances — was overwhelming.

She also doesn’t understand why the office refused to prosecute the case.

“It’s the million-dollar question,” Rodriguez said. “It’s really concerning to me that there has not been a clear answer and that’s something I think [Shakura] deserves.”

Repeat offenders

This case is [not the first time](#) the state’s attorney’s office has been accused of [mishandling sexual assault cases and survivors](#).

Baltimore County and the state of Maryland paid sexual assault survivor Anna



Shellenberger and county police detectives violated her First Amendment rights.

Amid complaints that county police and the state's attorney were not properly handling sexual assault cases, County Executive [Johnny Olszewski Jr. established](#) the [Sexual Assault Investigations Task Force](#) in 2019.

The task force [found that county law enforcement](#) was reluctant to pursue cases if women could not prove they physically resisted their assailants.

Roland Patterson Jr., president of Baltimore County's NAACP branch, said Shakura's case is the latest example of a pattern of racism and sexism by the state's attorney's office.

He suggested that Dever's comments about Black women lying reveal the office's discriminatory culture.

"It's a double misfortune that [Shakura's] crime and her victimization had to happen in [Baltimore County]," Patterson said. "It's a shame she had to suffer in this county, because in this county, she suffered twice."

Rodriguez explained that many survivors want a judge or jury to review their case to provide closure, and Shakura's case exemplifies just how difficult that is to achieve.

"We are still not — as a society — acknowledging the trauma of sexual violence and we know ... that so few of these cases are even reported ... and then even less are actually charged and even less are actually prosecuted and even less are actually convictions," she said.

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