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HB 497 – Family Law – Temporary and Final Protective Orders – Duration and Relief

**Hearing Before the Judiciary Committee
February 12, 2026**

Position: FAVORABLE

To the Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee:

[Community Legal Services](#) (CLS) supports House Bill 497. CLS provides free legal services to income-eligible Marylanders, with a goal of ensuring that everyone, regardless of income, has access to justice. We provide legal advice and representation to thousands of individuals and families every year. We strive to help our clients obtain and maintain family, housing, social and economic stability.

As part of our practice, we provide legal assistance and representation to survivors of domestic violence, including in Protective Order cases. In our experience, extending the duration of a Temporary Protective Order (TPO) from the current period to 14 days would be a practical and meaningful improvement that would strengthen access to protection while reducing unnecessary burdens on survivors and the courts.

First, extending the TPO to 14 days provides critical additional time for service of process. In counties with high case volumes, as well as in jurisdictions with smaller law enforcement units, timely service can be challenging. The additional time will improve the likelihood that respondents are properly served before the final hearing, allowing cases to proceed as scheduled.

Second, the extension meaningfully assists with cross-jurisdictional service. Many survivors reside or work across county lines, and respondents may be located in neighboring jurisdictions, including the District of Columbia, Virginia, Delaware, or Pennsylvania. Inter-county and interstate service frequently requires additional coordination. A 14-day TPO better reflects these logistical realities and supports effective enforcement and reduces the likelihood that survivors must return to court solely because service was not completed in time. Requiring survivors to make multiple court appearances due to service delays can be destabilizing, retraumatizing, and financially burdensome, particularly for those balancing employment and childcare.

Third, protective order proceedings often coincide with significant life transitions; extended time between hearings would offer survivors critical time to make practical arrangements related to housing, childcare, employment, and safety. If they filed the petition for TPO on their own, the additional time contemplated by this bill would also allow survivors a more realistic opportunity to secure legal counsel for the hearing on the Final Protective Order.

With respect to the bill's damages provision, courts are already familiar with awarding financial relief to petitioners through Emergency Family Maintenance, so this provision of the bill would not add complexity to the process for the courts hearing these cases. Also, allowing compensation for actual damages resulting from abusive conduct may provide meaningful relief to survivors, helping address medical expenses, moving costs, or lock changes, and other expenses that frequently arise in the aftermath of abuse.

Extending the Temporary Protective Order to 14 days better aligns the law with the realities faced by survivors and offers a practical, survivor-centered adjustment to the Protective Order process that promotes fairness, judicial efficiency, and access to justice.

For these reasons, Community Legal Services respectfully urges the Economic Matters Committee to **issue a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 497**. Please feel free to contact Lisa Sarro, Esq., at Sarro@clspgc.org or Jessica Quincosa, Esq., at Quincosa@clspgc.org with any questions.