



Senator William C. Smith
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

February 18, 2020

Dear Senator Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

JCADA supports Senate Bill 536 to ensure that religious barriers to remarriage after divorce are eliminated.

At JCADA, our mission is to support victims of power-based violence to become empowered and live safely; educate the community about power-based violence and appropriate responses; and prevent future generations from suffering power-based violence. We provide these services without regard to race, national origin, ability, background, faith, gender, gender identity, gender expression, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, and the clients we serve are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, harassment, elder abuse and dating violence. Last year, JCADA supported over 580 survivors of power-based violence and educated more than 2,800 youth, parents and educators about healthy relationships through our prevention program *AWARE*.

At JCADA, we provide free legal, counseling, and victim advocacy services to victims and survivors. One issue that comes up is religious barriers to remarriage following divorce. We have often worked with clients whose abuser has refused to grant them a “get,” or Jewish divorce. In fact, our advocates have accompanied clients to the Beit Din, or Jewish courts, to provide holistic advocacy in these settings. Unfortunately, many clients often have to barter in their civil divorce to ensure that they are granted a religious divorce; we’ve seen clients sacrifice property or spousal support they would legally be entitled to, to placate their abuser and ensure they are able to get both civilly and religiously divorced.

JCADA works closely with ORA, the Organization for the Resolution of Agunot (“chained women”). We often refer our clients to ORA when their abusers have refused to grant them a religious divorce. Unfortunately, the granting or refusal of a religious divorce is often one of the last ways that an abuser maintains power and coercive control over their victim. By helping clients receive a religious divorce, they are able to move on from the violence and trauma of an abusive marriage.



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Thank you for considering this testimony in support of SB 536. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at amanda@jcada.org.

Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amanda Katz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue ink color.

Amanda Katz
Executive Director