
BILL NO: House Bill 132
TITLE: Public Safety – Crime of Violence – Witness Intimidation
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 18, 2020
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

House Bill 132 would add witness intimidation to the list of crimes of violence found in Maryland's Public Safety Code. The Women's Law Center supports this bill because witness intimidation is a serious and sometimes even deadly matter. Being listed as a crime of violence brings with it graver consequences that are appropriate to the circumstances.

Maryland's Criminal Code contains a list of crimes of violence (§5-101- Public Safety Code), and House Bill would add witness intimidation to that list. Our work with domestic violence survivors involves legal representation in civil matters such as Protective Order cases or other collateral civil matters such as custody and divorce. However, we also support and advocate for our clients when they have chosen to move forward in the criminal arena and their abusers are being tried in court criminally. In these criminal cases, our client is often the key witness to the alleged crime. It is always shocking when we learn that the criminal defendant or an agent of the defendant has made threats or actually sought to impede our client from testifying against him. Such brazen and flagrant disregard for our system of laws is unconscionable.

In one Baltimore County case, our client was murdered by her abuser in front of her home on the morning she was leaving to go to court to testify in his criminal case. He shot and killed her with a long gun in front of her toddler.

Cases of witness intimidation turn our justice system on its head. They should be treated with the seriousness that other crimes of violence are treated. Perhaps this crime should be added to the Criminal Code §14-101 as well.

Therefore, the WLC supports House Bill 132 and urges a favorable report.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, membership organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change. The Women's Law Center operates two hotlines, Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County, and the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project.