

## IN SUPPORT OF HB-427

**To: House of Delegates, Judiciary Committee**  
**From: Margaret Strakna on behalf of the Gender Violence Clinic, University of Maryland Carey School of Law**  
**Date: February 5, 2020**  
**Re: Written Testimony in support of House Bill 427**

The Gender Violence Clinic represents clients with histories of and/or in matters involving intimate partner violence, rape, sexual assault, and trafficking. The Clinic has represented a number of clients who have sought to change their names after experiencing intimate partner violence.

Survivors of domestic violence may pursue a name change for a variety of reasons. For some, a name change is a crucial step to regaining anonymity after experiencing stalking or serious domestic violence. Other survivors who were married to their abuser may not have sought a name change during the divorce process, and now need to petition for the change later. Individuals who are transitioning genders seek to change their names as a critical part of their transition. While the reasons for a name change may vary, they are all sensitive in nature.

Maryland law currently requires persons who petition for a name change to publish their current name, their intended new name, and the deadline for objections to the petition in a paper of general circulation in the county of their residence. The publication must occur at least fifteen days before the objection deadline.

While on its face not particularly onerous, there are a number of reasons why the publication requirement is harmful to survivors of domestic violence. Because publication is required in the county where a survivor petitions, which is most often a county where he or she is living or working, publication serves as notice to an abuser of where they can find a survivor. This is not only problematic, but dangerous for victims who have sought refuge and safety through anonymity. For our transgender clients, publication is an announcement of their transition. Transitions are intensely personal decisions and should not automatically be publicized to the world. Sadly, doing so could potentially make transgender individuals targets for violence.

Changing your name is a personal decision no matter who you are and the circumstances surrounding the change. For our clients, a name change is crucial to regaining a sense of safety after experiencing traumatic acts of violence. Requiring survivors to advertise their decision has the potential to put abusers on notice and frustrating the initial purpose of the name change. HB 427 is an important clarification in the law in this regard. Requiring the court to grant a petition for waiver of publication helps protect clients at some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives.

For these reasons we support HB 427 and encourage the committee to offer a favorable report.