
BILL NO: House Bill 946
TITLE: Child Support Guidelines
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 20, 2020
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

House Bill 946 would update Maryland's Child Support Guidelines to accurately reflect costs in 2020, as well as to make some other changes to help the public understand the Guidelines. The Women's Law Center (WLC) supports HB 946 as it will help children in our state, will help educate the public about the reasoning and logic behind the Guidelines amounts in our law, and will increase the uniformity of orders at higher income levels. The Guidelines amounts desperately need to be updated to today's costs. The WLC participated in the Child Support Advisory Committee work for its 18 months or so duration, and this bill arises as a recommendation from that Committee, slightly modified from 2019's version.

HB 946 would update the Guidelines, which is how the vast majority of child support cases are calculated. Our current Guidelines are based on economic data from 2008. Not only would HB 946 update the Guidelines using current economic data, it would also make clear that the Guidelines have used and still use a self-support reserve for the paying parent. The self-support reserve is the amount of income a parent needs to have available to support themselves and remain above the federal poverty level after paying child support. In our work with self-represented litigants on our statewide family law hotline, we know that people who are being ordered to pay child support often do not realize that economists have weighed in on the issue of their own self-support when devising the Guideline amounts.

HB 946 proposes some revisions to other parts of the Guidelines, including modifying the lower end of the Guidelines for those whose joint monthly income is below \$1250, and raising the combined adjust monthly income from the current \$15,000 to \$30,000. In households with little income, we hope that the revision will encourage compliance. In households with more wealth, the predictability offered by raising this combined monthly income should lower litigation costs by providing more uniform decisions in those income areas. Importantly HB 946 also adds to the law a definition of voluntary impoverishment, and factors to consider in arriving at an appropriate order. We hope this will have a positive impact on child support cases by giving clear guidance to courts on what constitutes voluntary impoverishment.

The over-arching goal of the Child Support Advisory Committee, with many varied stakeholders participating, was to be realistic in addressing actual needs in today's dollars to support a child and what people can actually afford, to encourage payment, and to support children and families. This bill seeks to accomplish that goal.

Therefore, the Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges a favorable report on House Bill 946.

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.