

BILL NO: House Bill 1551
TITLE: Health Practitioners - Minor Patients - Child Abuse Reporting
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 27, 2020
POSITION: **OPPOSE**

House Bill 1551 would require, under the Health General Article that a health practitioner inform minor patients that they may report abuse. The Women's Law Center respectfully opposes this bill as we think it may create more confusion than clarity and we are not sure it accomplishes the intent behind the bill.

We understand that the intent of the bill is to educate minors that there may be resources if they are experiencing abuse. However, the bill requires people who are already mandatory reporters to inform minors that the minors may report. We think this is fraught with possible unintended consequences. If a mandatory reporter opens the door in conversation to allegations of abuse, a minor may then report to that mandatory reporter, without understanding that the practitioner is a mandatory reporter. This could put minors in grave danger, especially if they are *unknowingly* revealing allegations of abuse. We cannot devise an amendment that would solve the potential problems if minors enter into this topic without understanding the consequences.

Therefore, the Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 1551.

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 hotlines, Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County, the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project, and the Collateral Legal Assistance for Survivors Project.