

BILL NO.: House Bill 1294
TITLE: Criminal Procedure – Victims of Crime – Private Room
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
DATE: March 6, 2020
POSITION: SUPPORT

House Bill 1294 is a simple bill that establishes the most basic amount of dignity for survivors of sexual assault and other crimes against the person. In essence, it requires law enforcement agencies and units to provide notification to the public that victims of crime may request a private room to report a crime against them. This is an easy to accommodate request that would provide support for survivors and prevent retraumatization from being forced to share their stories in public settings where anyone can hear.

Retraumatization is recognized as a re-experiencing of an initial trauma event. It can be triggered by a situation, an attitude or expression, or by certain environments that replicate the dynamics (such as loss of power/control/safety) of the original trauma. By forcing victims to retell the violence that was enacted against them in a public space, without taking into consideration a trauma-informed approach to care, we risk victims being less willing to trust law enforcement, seek out continuing treatment, and greater risk for additional chronic stress.

Providing a private room is an easy way to alleviate the risks of retraumatizing survivors without additional costs or burdens on the state or local governments. Trauma-informed care includes practices that promote a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing, which are the very least we should offer victims of crime.

At the WLC we have experienced a wide variety of responses from law enforcement agencies as it relates to victims reporting crime. While some agencies are incredibly responsive the inconsistencies are troubling and need to be addressed. For the above reasons, the Women's Law Center of Maryland urges a favorable report for HB1294.

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.