
BILL NO: House Bill 909
TITLE: Maryland Healthy Working Families Act – Applicability
COMMITTEE: Economic Matters
HEARING DATE: March 3, 2021
POSITION: **OPPOSE**

In 2017 the Legislature passed The Maryland Healthy Working Families Act (“MHWFA”). The MHWFA finally grants workers the right to earn safe and sick leave so that they no longer must choose between their jobs and their health and safety. After overcoming several hurdles, including the Governor’s veto, the bill went into law and into effect in February 2018. Now, with the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to ravage our communities, this legislation is being proposed to undermine, delay, and erode the benefits of that hard-won piece of legislation.

The Women’s Law Center, as members of the Maryland Working Matters Coalition, wholeheartedly supported MHWFA because it provides a reasonable and comprehensive approach to ensuring an important benefit that protects the health and safety of families, workers, and the community. Now is not the time to roll back those benefits and for the reasons below, the WLC opposes all of the bills seeking to chip away at those provisions, including attempts to exclude application of the law to County Board of Education employees.

Of particular importance to the Women’s Law Center are the provisions of MHWFA regarding “Safe Leave”. These provisions allow an employee to use earned leave days to deal with medical, psychological or legal issues arising from domestic violence. As one in four women is the victim of domestic violence or sexual assault, it is imperative that survivors be able to get treatment for an injury or initiate legal proceedings without fearing they will lose their jobs if they take time off. This applies to all workers – regardless of their status or their employer.

The ability to have legal representation and/or to go to court to obtain a protective order can have a profound effect on a victim’s ability to leave an abuser and optimize their safety. But in order to do those things, the victim must first be able to take the time to make those appointments. However, financial insecurity is one of the most common reasons women stay with their abusers, and it should be no surprise to learn that taking unpaid leave to appear at court, or to make appointments with counselors or lawyers, is a financial burden too many of our clients are unable to bare.

The HFWA will allow victims to address these important issues that preserve their safety without risking job security. It ensures women do not have to weigh physical health against economic stability because paid sick and safe leave will be available to them. Its implementation should remain fully in effect.

Therefore, the Women’s Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 909.

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 statewide Collateral Legal Assistance for Survivors and Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Projects.