



SB0555 – Criminal Procedure – Victims of Sexually Assaultive Behavior – Required Meeting
Presented to the Hon. Will Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 23, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue a **favorable report on SB0555 - Criminal Procedure – Victims of Sexually Assaultive Behavior – Required Meeting**, sponsored by Senator Ronald Young.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we work to ensure that every individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families, and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. This includes ensuring that Marylanders feel confident enough in our justice system to trust that sexual assault cases will be taken seriously. We believe in giving survivors a chance to find some form of closure through the criminal justice system, even if their perpetrators are not charged. Accordingly, following a decision to not file charges or drop them altogether in a sexual assault case, we support requiring an assistant state’s attorney to meet with every victim who requests an explanation as to why they did not pursue the case.

According to the U.S. Justice Department, sexual assault remains drastically underreported, with only around [23% of victims reporting their assaults to the police](#).ⁱ Survivors cite many reasons as to why they choose not to go to the police, including [13% who do not think the police would want to help](#). This demonstrates a lack of trust in the criminal justice system, specifically when it comes to sexual assault victims. Of the cases that are brought to the police, [only about 20% lead to charges](#),ⁱⁱ and the remaining majority of these charges are dropped. To those who are still considering whether to report an assault, this can be extremely discouraging, and to the victims who reported these crimes, this can feel extremely invalidating and traumatizing as they watch their attackers be absolved of accountability. If Maryland were to require that an assistant State’s attorney with knowledge of the case meet with the victim and explain why their case was not pursued further, this may alleviate some of the trauma associated with their case. While it may not be the exact justice the victim seeks, many survivors simply want to feel heard. Being unable to pursue justice after a sexual assault can feel incredibly traumatizing, and these meetings could provide much needed clarity for survivors.

No victim of any crime should be left with unanswered questions. The State of Maryland should do everything it can to provide as many answers as possible for those who feel failed by our justice system, and this includes those who experienced sexual violence. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0555**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ⁱ Morgan, Rachel E., and Grace Kena. “Criminal Victimization, 2016: Revised.” Bureau of Justice Statistics. U.S. Department of Justice, October 2016. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv16.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ “The Criminal Justice System: Statistics.” RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), n.d. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>.