



VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

February 26, 2021

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support - SB581 – Action for Change of Name - Waiver of Publication Requirement

Dear Chairman Smith:

Senate Bill 581 waives the publication requirement for an individual seeking a name change under Maryland Rule 15-901. People who file the request to change their name must make the request to withhold the publication notice. Under current law, individuals who petition for a name change because of an adoption or a divorce are exempt from the publication requirement. All others seeking a change must publish a notice in a newspaper of general circulation listing the individual's current name and his or her intended new name. This can put survivors of intimate partner violence at great risk.

The Montgomery County Victim Services Advisory Board (VSAB) advises the County Council and County Executive on assisting with the needs of violent crime victims, including victims of rape, domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking. The number and severity of sexual assault and domestic violence cases referred to the Montgomery County HHS Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program and the Abused Persons Program increased substantially in one year when comparing 2019 and 2020 intake data. The Montgomery County Police also reported concerns with an increase in violence in 2020 when investigating domestic violence calls. (<https://wtop.com/montgomery-county>, Oct. 16, 2020)

Victims of such crimes are often fleeing dangerous perpetrators. Many victims strive for independence but struggle to create as much distance and privacy as they can in order to begin a new chapter in their lives. For some, concealing their identity is a critical prerequisite for protection and survival. Allowing victims to conceal name changes from the public can significantly contribute to their safety, and their children's safety, and may mean the difference between life and death.

VSAB asks the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 581.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Pontzer & Juanita Rogers
VSAB Co-chairs

Department of Health and Human Services