



BILL NO: House Bill 31
TITLE: Courts - Surcharges and Payment to Rental Assistance Programs
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 17, 2021
POSITION: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report with amendment on HB 31.**

House Bill 31 allows for an increase in court filing fees to prevent further reductions in funding to Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC), the organization that makes grants for the provision of civil legal services to low-income Marylanders. This bill also direct funds to rental assistance programs in Maryland. Many of the service providers that comprise MNADV, provide critical legal services to victims of domestic violence. These victim service providers rely on MLSC funding to offer legal representation for domestic violence victims. Representation is critical in ensuring victim’s safety with one study finding that 83 percent of victims represented by an attorney successfully obtained a protective order, as compared to just 32 percent of victims without an attorney.¹

MLSC funding has been significantly impaired by the COVID-19 pandemic while the needs of victims of domestic violence have increased. The filing surcharge fee in HB 31 will help avoid a further reduction in MLSC funding and allow MLSC and the legal service agencies that it supports to continue to provide critical legal services. These legal service agencies include many victim service providers for survivors of domestic violence who provide critical representation including assisting victims in obtaining protective orders against their abusers.

MNADV supports the technical amendment proposed by Maryland Legal Services Corporation that would separate the MLSC surcharge increase from the proposed surcharge for rental assistance.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report with amendment on HB 31.**

¹ Jane Murphy, *Engaging with the State: The Growing Reliance on Lawyers and Judges to Protect Battered Women*, 11 Am. U. J. Gender Soc. Pol’y & L. 499, 511-12 (2003).

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