



Working to end sexual violence in Maryland

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Testimony in Support of House Bill 496
Lisae C. Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel
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The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence in the State of Maryland. We urge the Finance Committee to report favorably on House Bill 496 with Amendments.

House Bill 496 – Paid Family Leave

Economic stability is critical for survivors of abuse seeking to leave violent situations and reduce risk of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse. This bill is an important piece of economic security for all Marylanders, including survivors. As originally introduced, HB496 would help address the economic hardship, stress, and other burdens that come into play when caring for new children, loved ones with serious health conditions, or yourself. Employees' ability to take up to 12 weeks of paid leave will help Maryland families meet their caregiving, employment, and financial needs and commitments while caring for their family.

HB 496 would have furthered the purposes of the Family Medical Leave Act and the state laws extending similar protections. Many employees, including survivors of sexual violence, have been assisted by the passage of laws allowing them to take leave to care for their own or a close family member's serious health condition, or to care for a new child, without losing their job. Yet the ability to take leave is often accompanied by a reduction or elimination of the employee's regular wages. This leaves many abuse victims – particularly low income women – without meaningful access to leave.

To address the current economic crisis, and return the over a million women to our workforce, and our economy, the legislature must take action. House Bill 496 as introduced was a reasonable and modest effort that demonstrates Maryland's commitment to working families by

helping to protect their health, stability and wellbeing, and will have an immediate positive impact on our economy.

Safe Time

MCASA respectfully requests that the Committee amend HB496 to also permit paid leave for “safe time”. Safe time is an integral part of Maryland’s Family Medical Leave Act, allowing survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence to take earned time off to seek protective orders, counseling, and to tend to other matters related to addressing and ending violence. While many of these activities would also qualify for paid leave under HB496, others will not – but they should. Paid family leave should include time to protect yourself and your family from further violence.

Time to Act, Further Discussion is Unnecessary

MCASA was disappointed that the House chose to turn HB496 into a Commission bill to discuss issues that have been thoroughly vetted. We strongly encourage the Finance Committee to reject this approach and act to create paid family leave and conform HB496 to SB275 with the Safe Time amendment discussed above.

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