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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 296- Interim and Temporary Protective Orders - Electronic Filing and Video Conferencing Hearings

Judiciary Committee – February 3, 2022
SUPPORT

Background: House Bill 296, (HB296) would enable eligible victims of abuse to petition electronically for an interim or temporary protective order in a hospital setting. Eligible victims include victims of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and abused vulnerable older adults. The victim would simply fill out the online protective order form, submit it electronically and have their *ex parte* hearing virtually while in the safety of a hospital.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council represents the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore and its agencies, including CHANA. CHANA provides crisis intervention, case management, supportive counseling, shelter, legal advocacy and support to victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse and elder abuse in Baltimore County and Baltimore City. Clients experience physical, sexual, psychological, financial, technological and spiritual abuse. We support HB296 because it enhances safety and improves access for victims of abuse. Clients are often tracked by their abuser on their phone or via a tracking device, making it a huge risk to go to the court or commissioner's office to apply for a protective order. However, going to a hospital, where staff are trained and generally screen for violence, removes a huge burden for victims.

Currently in Maryland, victims of violence cannot leave the hospital with any protection from their abuser. Their abuser could be in the waiting room, the parking lot or at home. The ability to leave the hospital with protection is hugely important to their future safety.

Lastly, this is not a new concept, other states, like New Jersey, have been doing similar virtual hearings for over 10 years. Recently, California, Washington State, West Virginia and Washington D.C. expanded electronic accessibility and access of protective orders and other filings and hearings to help victims. Maryland's judiciary has the technological ability to accept electronic filings and conduct electronic hearings. Throughout the pandemic, all types of hearings have been heard virtually. HB296 takes the positive lessons learned from Covid and increases safety for victims of violence.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Council asks for a favorable report on HB296.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.

BALTIMORE JEWISH COUNCIL

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