

Testimony before House Judiciary Committee

Senate Bill 280 - Interim and Temporary Protective Orders – Electronic Filing and Video Conferencing Hearings

Support

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Committee on Aging, we would like to express our support for *Senate Bill 280 – Interim and Temporary Protective Orders – Electronic Filing and Video Conferencing Hearings*.

As social workers serving older adults, we see the devastating impact of domestic violence among seniors and adults of all ages. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, one in four women and one in nine men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, sexual violence, or stalking. One of the best protections available to victims in Maryland is the Protective Order. Currently, the victim needs to go to court or to a commissioner's office to file for a Protective Order and must return to court at least once for a hearing. For many victims, these requirements present insurmountable obstacles. Those victims who are ill or injured (sometimes because of the abuse) are often unable to appear in person in court.

HB 296 provides an alternative path to obtain a Protective Order, for victims who are receiving medical treatment in a hospital or urgent care center. Victims would be able to file electronically and participate in a virtual hearing. These provisions would allow some of the most vulnerable victims to obtain the relief offered by a Protective Order, including the requirement that the abuser stay away from the victim for up to a year.

We have worked with victims in cases where this law would have prevented great harm. In one case, a woman with disabilities was being physically abused by her nephew. After an assault by the nephew, she was brought to the hospital for treatment of her injuries and other health problems. She was physically unable to go to court to get a Protective Order. Since her nephew was not arrested, she faced the fear of further harm from him after her discharge. He continued to menace her until Adult Protective Services was able to intervene and help her move to a new home. If SB 280 had been in effect at that time, she would likely have received legal protection from her abuser and would have been spared much fear and hardship.

Victims of domestic violence experience physical and emotional trauma. They deserve every opportunity to seek protection from their abusers. SB 280 would enable more victims to file for Protective Orders, a key step in helping them in their journeys to safety.

We ask that you give a favorable report to SB 280.

Respectfully,

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Executive Director, NASW-MD