



Family Crisis Resource Center, Inc.

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BILL NO: House Bill 296
TITLE: Interim and Temporary Protective Orders – Electronic Filing and Video Conferencing Hearings
COMMITTEE: Judicial
HEARING DATE: February 3, 2022
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

My name is Rhonda Pick. I have been an Advocate and Lethality Assessment Coordinator at Family Crisis Resource Center in Allegany County for the past 21 years working with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault/abuse. Living and working in a rural community often presents barriers for those seeking assistance in leaving a domestic violence relationship safely. The most common barrier is transportation. Victims in our community often do not own or have access to a vehicle and depend on family, friends, and the limited transportation system to access services. It is common for those living in the outlying areas to travel 30 – 45 minutes to reach the city center, where most services are located, making the decision to file for a protective order seem like an insurmountable task. While victims often do not want to burden others with being driven to the courthouse to file for a Protective Order, they will ask for assistance in getting to the hospital to be examined after an assault. Over the last 5 years, UPMC Western Maryland performed 512 lethality assessments on patients, with 424 of those patients being “screened in” as high danger of being killed as a result of an act of domestic violence. Allowing victims to petition the District Court for an Interim or Temporary Protective Order via electronic filing and video conferencing while at the hospital would help many in our community break the transportation barrier and allow easy access to the civil justice remedies available to them.

Electronic filing and video conferencing will also decrease the possibility of abusers following victims to the courthouse to harass or cause further harm to them or those that are assisting them. Abusers not only hurt or kill their partners, they also do harm to others in the victims’ lives. A study published in the American Journal of Public Health in March 2014; **Intimate Partner Homicide and Corollary Victims in 16 States: National Violent Death Reporting System, 2003–2009; Sharon G Smith PhD, Katherine A. Fowler PhD, and Phyllis H. Niolon PhD**; states that not all victims of domestic homicide are the intimate partner of the offender. According to their study approximately 20% of the victims were corollary victims. These victims included family members, new intimate partners, friends, acquaintances, police officers, and strangers. House Bill 296 would allow victims and their support persons to be safe from abusers while filing for a protective order.

With the pandemic, the courts, victim service agencies, and hospitals throughout the state of Maryland have had to alter their approach to delivering services. The technology exists and is currently utilized by both the courts and hospitals on a routine basis.

For the reasons listed above, we are asking for a favorable report on House Bill 296.



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