



Marjorie Cook Foundation
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SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS HOUSE BILL 561

February 17, 2022

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House of Ruth is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal representation to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House of Ruth has offices in Baltimore City, Prince George's County, Montgomery County, and Baltimore County. House Bill 561 sets out a training program for judges who preside over child custody cases that involve child abuse or domestic violence. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to amend and report favorably report on House Bill 561.**

House of Ruth supports the intent of HB 561 and believes it is important that judges receive training about the impact of domestic violence and trauma on victims and children. However, HB 561, as drafted, is too restrictive. House of Ruth suggests the bill be amended to strike all language starting on page 2, line 3. For many years, including as recently as Fall, 2021, House of Ruth staff have conducted judicial trainings about many of these topics. What we have learned is that the training needs of the Judiciary change over time to keep pace with new research, trends, and developments regarding domestic violence and the impacts of trauma on victims and children. The very pointed list of subjects in this current bill may (or may not) be the important topics today, but may not remain the priorities in the future. HB 561, as drafted, requires trainings on the same topics year after year and does not leave room for flexibility or discretion without another act of the Legislature. That is too rigid and unworkable a framework to have the intended beneficial effect.

House of Ruth is happy to continue to work with the Maryland Judiciary to develop a training program, and hopes the Legislature will afford the Judiciary the flexibility needed to craft a training curriculum that will best address the needs of Maryland's children.

House of Ruth urges the House Judiciary Committee to amend HB 561 and report favorably.