



Marjorie Cook Foundation
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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 210

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House of Ruth Maryland is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House of Ruth has offices in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Prince George’s County, and Montgomery County. House Bill 210 allows a spouse to be compelled to testify against their spouse if they got married after the date on which the alleged crime occurred. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 210.**

Section 9-106 of the Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article prevents a spouse from being compelled to testify as a witness against their spouse in a criminal case. This law is known colloquially as the “spousal privilege.” Under the current version of the law, the spousal privilege cannot be invoked in cases where the defendant-spouse is charged with assaulting his/her spouse if the defendant was previously charged with assaulting his/her spouse and the victim-spouse previously invoked the spousal privilege. HB 210 would expand the exception to the spousal privilege to cases where the defendant and the victim got married after the date on which the alleged crime for which the defendant is on trial occurred.

HB 210 will protect victims of intimate partner violence from being coerced into marriage in order for their abusers to avoid criminal prosecution. Victims of domestic violence are frequently subjected to intimidation, coercion, threats, and sometimes acts of violence to force them to drop protective orders, not to call the police, or not to appear in court for criminal, family law, or other legal proceedings. House of Ruth has worked with multiple clients whose abusers forced them to marry and then invoke spousal privilege so that the criminal case was dismissed. HB 210 would protect victims of domestic violence from this form of coercion.

The House of Ruth urges a favorable report on House Bill 210.