



Marjorie Cook Foundation  
Domestic Violence Legal Clinic

2201 Argonne Drive • Baltimore, Maryland 21218 • 410-554-8463 • dlennig@hruthmd.org

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 338**

February 10, 2022

**DOROTHY J. LENNIG, LEGAL CLINIC DIRECTOR**

The 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 Bill 338 would specify that child neglect does not extend to victims of domestic violence who do not leave their abusers. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 338.**

House Bill 338 would specify that child neglect does not include, on the part of a victim of domestic violence, failing to protect a child from witnessing domestic violence, failing to leave a home or relationship in which domestic violence has occurred, failing to call the police or social services, or failing to file a protective order. This bill would alleviate an unfortunate reality: that victims, instead of the perpetrators of abuse, are often blamed and punished for the impacts of the abuse on their children

House of Ruth staff have worked with numerous clients over the years who have had their children removed because they “failed to protect” the children from the impacts of domestic violence perpetrated by the clients’ abusive partners. Instead of holding the abuser accountable for his acts of domestic violence, some Child Protective Services (CPS) workers and others in the legal system instead try to force victims to end the relationship, move out of the house, call police or take other legal action to stop the abuse by threatening to remove the children from the victim’s care or actually doing so. This approach is misguided at best and can, in some instances, actually increase the danger for the victim and her children, as the time immediately after separation from an abuser is the most dangerous.

A House of Ruth employee worked with a mother whose children’s father abused her repeatedly and threatened to kill her if she ever called police or tried to leave the relationship. After father assaulted one of the children, CPS removed the children from mother on the rationale that because father abused mother, she should have known that eventually he would hurt the child. Mother was restricted to having only supervised visits with the children and CPS eventually moved to terminate her parental rights. Mother endured almost two years of hearings, continuances, and other delays, all while trying to get her children back. Instead of helping mother to be safe and holding father accountable for his abusive behavior, the system punished mother for being a victim. HB 338 would curtail this misuse of the system.

**The House of Ruth urges a favorable report on House Bill 338.**