

BILL NO: Senate Bill 111
TITLE: Criminal Procedure - Protection of Identity of Minor Victim
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: March 26, 2024
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland (WLC) is a non-profit legal services and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. While our direct representation projects are limited to primarily survivors of domestic violence, our advocacy is in support of gender justice as a whole, because all women are entitled to access to justice, equality, and autonomy. We recognize that all the issues we fight for are interconnected. Women cannot have bodily autonomy unless they have physical safety. They cannot have physical safety without economic security. And they cannot have economic security without bodily autonomy.

Senate Bill 111 would require identifying information regarding a minor victim of crime be redacted in a charging document or any other filings in a criminal or juvenile delinquency case. Information necessary for the case could be filed under seal. The court may, if there is clear and convincing evidence of good cause to do so, issue an order otherwise allowing such information to be included in the pleadings.

The WLC supports SB111 as it will help protect victim privacy and identity, a matter that is of great concern to our clients. Privacy is extremely important to the majority of survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Those crimes, by their very definition, deal with the most private and intimate areas of a victim's life, and as such should be handled with sensitivity. The rise of electronic filing and easily accessible court documents makes it all too easy for others to learn the identity of survivors and to exploit that information. For children (and others) this can lead to embarrassment, harassment, bullying, discrimination, and emotional harm. Knowing there is a possibility of their identity and personal information being made available to the public has a chilling effect on survivors' willingness to cooperate with the justice system. If anything, the WLC would agree with other advocates that SB111 does not go far enough and the Committee may wish to include protection for other minors, such as witnesses, within the scope of the bill.

For these reasons, the Women's Law Center of Maryland strongly urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 111.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.