

IN OPPOSITION TO SB 650

To: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Professor Leigh Goodmark, Director, Gender, Prison, and Trauma Clinic, University of Maryland Carey School of Law and Professor Margaret E. Johnson, Director, Bronfein Family Law Clinic, University of Baltimore School of Law
Date: February 10, 2025
Re: Written Testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 650

We write oppose Senate Bill 650.* We have represented victims of intimate partner violence for decades, and while we appreciate the desire to decrease rates of intimate partner violence in Maryland, there is no evidence to suggest that a registry will have that impact and, in fact, could have a number of unintended consequences.

Very few people who commit acts of domestic violence are arrested and prosecuted; even fewer are convicted. A registry will always underrepresent the population of people who have committed acts of violence. Moreover, a registry captures only the very narrow categories of abuse that are criminalized: physical and sexual violence and threats of physical violence. Intimate partner violence is a much more complex problem, involving isolation, emotional, psychological, economic, reproductive, and spiritual abuse—none of which is the subject of criminal prosecution. Because the registry will not capture even a fraction of the population of people using violence in their relationships and captures only a very narrow subset of problematic behavior, checking a registry may give a person a false sense of security, believing that if their partner is not in the registry, they are not abusive.

Registries also ignore the complex relationships between people who use violence and their partners. The victims of people who use violence may not want their partners—or themselves—exposed to the public notoriety and shame of a registry. The registry could chill reporting of intimate partner violence.

The registry law might also inadvertently harm victims of violence. Victims of violence are frequently arrested, prosecuted, and convicted for crimes related to their own victimization. For all of these reasons, the National Network to End Domestic Violence has stated, “A domestic violence offender registry has many potentially harmful consequences and, regardless of the intended goals, is not a tool for primary prevention.”

Registries have not decreased recidivism in cases of sexual violence. They will not decrease recidivism in cases of intimate partner violence. What would decrease recidivism is addressing the root causes of violence: trauma, community instability, economic distress. We respectfully oppose Senate Bill 650.

*This written testimony is submitted on behalf of Professors Goodmark and Johnson and not on behalf of the University of Maryland Carey School of Law, University of Maryland, Baltimore, University of Baltimore School of Law, or University of Baltimore.