



Domestic Violence Legal Clinic

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Bill No.: Senate Bill 567
Bill Title: Criminal Procedure – District Court Commissioners and False Statements
Committee: Judicial Proceedings
Hearing Date: February 5, 2025
Position: **UNF**

House of Ruth 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. Senate Bill 567 would prohibit District Court commissioners from issuing an arrest warrant to anyone but a police officer or State's Attorney. **We urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to unfavorably report on Senate Bill 567.**

The ability to apply for a statement of charges with a District Court Commissioner and have an arrest warrant issued is an important safety tool for victims of domestic violence. Many victims are unable to call 911 during an abusive incident, either because the abuser takes away or destroys their phone or threatens to kill the victim if they attempt to call 911. Their only recourse in such instances is to go to a District Court Commissioner at the first safe opportunity to do so and apply for a statement of charges. Even when victims are able to call 911 in the midst of an incident of abuse, very often the abuser has fled the scene before police arrive. Victims should not have to rely upon law enforcement or the State's Attorney's Office to make the decision to file criminal charges in order to seek redress for these incidents.

In addition to needing the option to file charges for an incident of abuse, many victims also need the opportunity to file charges for violations of protective orders. Curtailing the ability for a victim to apply for an arrest warrant will remove another important safety tool from victims of domestic violence and will lessen accountability for perpetrators of abuse.

The House of Ruth urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to report unfavorably on Senate Bill 567.