

BILL NO: House Bill 0293  
TITLE: Criminal Procedure - Child Victims - Testimony in Child Abuse Cases  
COMMITTEE: Judiciary  
HEARING DATE: February 6, 2025  
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

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House Bill 0293 repeals the requirement that child victims testifying in child abuse cases be not able to reasonably communicate before the court can order that their testimony be taken outside the courtroom and shown via closed circuit television. The current statute is severely limiting and forces a child victim to undergo additional suffering before given this accommodation.

Society has a duty to protect children from harm. The Women's Law Center recognizes that great emotional trauma is created when children are obliged to testify about their own abuse, **especially when more than 75% are victimized by a parent** (National Children's Alliance). While we know that child abuse occurs across all socioeconomic and education levels, as well as religious, ethnic, and cultural lines, indigenous and Black children experience the highest rates of victimization; additionally, developmentally and intellectually disabled children experience abuse at a rate almost three-and-a-half times higher than a non-disabled child. The Women's Law Center was founded to protect the marginalized and abused women of Maryland, and we support this legislation's intent to protect child victims and minimize further trauma among society's most vulnerable.

The use of closed circuit television for testifying child victims is widely accepted as an exception to the Sixth Amendment's Confrontation Clause and both minimizes further trauma and helps protect the trial record. Maryland v. Craig (1990) was used to facilitate teleconferenced testimony during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we believe that victimized children deserve at least that same level of protection from exposure to additional harm – psychological, emotional, or otherwise.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland believes that this bill will protect society's most vulnerable from greater trauma and result in increased access to justice. For these reasons we urge a favorable report on House Bill 0293.

*The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.*