

BILL NO: House Bill 21  
TITLE: Criminal Procedure – District Court Commissioners and False Statements  
COMMITTEE: Judiciary  
HEARING DATE: January 28, 2025  
POSITION: **OPPOSE**

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The Women's Law Center of Maryland (WLC) is a non-profit legal service 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, because all women are entitled to access to justice, equality, and autonomy. We recognize that all the issues we fight for are interconnected.

HB21 would prohibit a District Court Commissioner from issuing an arrest warrant to an individual other than a police officer or a State's Attorney. It would increase the penalty for making a false statement or report to a certain governmental official or unit from 6 months to up to 3 years imprisonment.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland believes that this law would put victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) at risk for many reasons. Many times, a victim is restricted from reaching out to law enforcement after an abusive incident. Lack of resources like a cell phone (which the abuser may have confiscated), transportation and or childcare, may delay the ability to immediately seek out the services of law enforcement and or the courts. Having the ability to apply for charges to a District Court Commissioner when a victim is able to is essential. Many of our clients do not realize that the abuse they have experienced is criminal until they seek services from domestic violence advocates and attorneys.

As such, The Women's Law Center of Maryland urges an unfavorable report on HB21

***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.***