

BILL NO: House Bill 847  
TITLE: Criminal Procedure - Domestic Violence Offender Registry  
COMMITTEE: Judiciary  
HEARING DATE: February 20, 2025  
POSITION: **OPPOSE**

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House Bill 847 would create a domestic violence offender registry, akin to sex offender registries. The Women's Law Center (WLC) opposes HB 847 because this response to intimate partner violence will not improve or eradicate violence, and may in fact chill the filing of criminal charges in these cases.

HB 847 provides that after three criminal convictions of a crime designated as "domestically related," the defendant shall be registered on a domestic violence registry. Victims access the civil protective order process over the criminal process for a variety of legitimate reasons including not wanting to cause the incarceration of their partner, not wanting to cause a loss of employment by their partner, and more. A 15-year label (with the possibility of longer) imposed by HB 847 on their abuser may additionally chill reporting of domestically related crimes due to the resulting instability of societal exclusion, blocked employment opportunities, and increased likelihood of homelessness so that a well-intentioned victim is likely to invite their abuser back into their life because of the resulting inability to support themselves following their criminalization. This bill is certain to cause problems if the family wants to have all parents engaged with the children.

Lastly, three convictions requires a belief that the criminal justice system is convicting perpetrators of domestic violence at a great rate. This is not true. In our experience, most prosecutions of domestically-related crimes do not result in a conviction. So having a mandatory registry only for those who receive three convictions is not only an unreachable and unbearable standard, it moves the goalposts so far that we can foresee a reinforcement of our society's disregard for victims in the codification that one or even two convictions of domestic violence is simply not that serious.

We are not persuaded that there is a valid public interest in establishing a registry for these cases. This is not a victim-focused effort. If the idea is a one-stop shop for law enforcement, they have many resources to acquire necessary information on individuals, and a registry is not necessary.

Therefore, the Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 847.