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Environment and Transportation
Committee
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Sponsor Testimony

HB 1440 – Courts – Parental Accommodations

Judiciary Committee

27 February 2025

Thank you, Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Delegate Robbyn Lewis, here to present HB 1440, a bill that improves accommodation of nursing parents and caregivers of small children in our jury duty system.

This bill proposes two important accommodations for Marylanders who are breastfeeding and caring for young children when summoned to jury service.

First, the bill requires any circuit courthouse that is built, or undergoes major renovation on or after October 1, 2025, to have a private lactation room on its premises. This lactation room must be furnished with a chair, table, electrical outlet, sink, refrigerator, and a door that locks to ensure privacy.

Secondly, this bill expands allowable reasons for excusal from jury duty. It allows breast-feeding mothers and caregivers of young children under the age of four to be excused from jury duty.

In current law, excusal from jury service is allowed for extreme inconvenience, public necessity, and undue hardship. Nursing and care of newborns and small children seem not to have been contemplated as inconvenient, necessary or difficult. This exclusion is a relic of the days when caring for children was undervalued as “women’s work” and women’s enfranchisement, broad employment and participation in public life was viewed as contingent.

Like many great legislative proposals, this one was inspired by one of my District 46 constituents, Rachel Wagner. Like many Marylanders who care for small children, Ms. Wagner has personally experienced the hardship our current jury service code imposes. She contacted me and my District 46 colleagues and called for change. We have done our best to respond.

Given the childcare challenges faced by so many Maryland families, this bill is needed. It helps balance the demands of civic engagement and family life.

Other states have adopted similar measures to support families, and Maryland should do the same. Twenty-two states including California, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and Virginia already allow breastfeeding mothers to be excused from jury duty. Additionally, states like California and Florida have passed laws requiring courthouses to provide lactation rooms for public use. Maryland should align itself with these best practices to create a judicial system that supports all citizens in fulfilling both their civic duties and family responsibilities.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1440. Thank you for your consideration.