

## **2025-02-20 HB 847 - Support in Concept .pdf**

Uploaded by: Adam Spangler

Position: FAV

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*Chief Operating Officer*

February 20, 2025

TO: The Honorable Luke Clippinger  
Chair, Judiciary Committee

FROM: Adam Spangler  
Legislative Aide, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: House Bill 847 - Criminal Procedure - Domestic Violence Offender Registry  
- **Support in Concept**

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The Office of Attorney General (OAG) supports the intent of **House Bill 847** - Criminal Procedure - Domestic Violence Offender Registry. This bill aims to establish the Domestic Violence Offender Registry and introduces vital changes to the existing laws surrounding domestic violence in Maryland, ultimately enhancing community safety and accountability for offenders.

One of the most significant changes to existing law surrounding domestic violence made in **House Bill 847** involves the requirement for individuals convicted three or more times of domestically-related crimes to register with the county sheriff's office. Currently, Maryland does not have a centralized system to monitor repeat domestic violence offenders, which can leave communities vulnerable. This bill seeks to fill that gap by ensuring that these offenders are tracked and that their information is accessible to law enforcement and the public.

**House Bill 847** defines "domestically related crimes" as encompassing not only crimes of domestic violence but also other offenses against individuals with whom the offender has had a sexual relationship within the past 12 months preceding the commission of a crime. This broadened definition increases the scope of protection for potential victims.

Importantly, the establishment of a central computerized Domestic Violence Offender Registry will provide law enforcement with essential tools to monitor offenders. This registry will include comprehensive information such as names, addresses, details of registered crimes, and digital images. This level of detail is crucial for law enforcement agencies aiming to prevent further offenses and protect individuals from potential harm.

Moreover, the bill outlines specific procedures for offenders to update their registration information, requiring them to report any address changes within 10 days and confirm their registration annually. This ongoing requirement ensures that the information remains current, which is fundamental for effective monitoring.

However, it is important to highlight a potential fiscal impact associated with implementing this registry. The costs related to developing, maintaining, and ensuring the security of the centralized database may be significant. Additionally, the requirement for law enforcement agencies to manage ongoing updates and monitoring could necessitate additional funding or personnel training, which would need to be carefully considered in the current legislative budgeting process.

By implementing these changes, **House Bill 847** aims to protect victims while encouraging accountability among repeat offenders. **House Bill 847** signifies a serious commitment to tackling domestic violence in our communities and ensures law enforcement has the necessary tools to combat this issue. For the foregoing reasons, the OAG supports the spirit of this bill.

cc: The Honorable Delegate Aletheia McCaskill  
Judiciary Committee Members

# **HB0847\_Domestic\_Violence\_Offender\_Registry\_MLC\_FAV**

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



**TESTIMONY FOR HB0847**  
**Criminal Procedure – Domestic Violence Offender Registry**

**Bill Sponsor:** Delegate McCaskill

**Committee:** Judiciary

**Organization Submitting:** Maryland Legislative Coalition

**Person Submitting:** Cecilia Plante, co-chair

**Position:** FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB0847 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Domestic violence is a crime that too often does not result in a criminal record, yet it is a horrible crime and those who are convicted and then given probation or a suspended sentence should be known. For someone who is running for office, or who is being considered for a powerful position, or even who is getting married again, this information should not be buried only to come to light way too late.

This bill would establish a Domestic Violence Offender Registry, similar to the Sex Offender Registry, in the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. Any person who has been convicted of domestic violence acts, regardless of whether they are given probation, a suspended sentence, or are not sentenced to jail time, would have to register with the county sheriff who would then forward the information to the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. The person who has been convicted would have their name on the registry for a minimum of 15 years (longer for convictions after they are on the registry).

Just like sex offenses, the public should know about domestic violence offenders. We strongly support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.

## **Testimony in support of HB0847 - Criminal Procedur**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

02/20/2025

Richard Keith Kaplowitz  
Frederick, MD 21703-7134

**TESTIMONY ON HB#0847 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Criminal Procedure - Domestic Violence Offender Registry**

**TO:** Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee  
**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

**My name is Richard Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony supporting HB#/0847, Criminal Procedure - Domestic Violence Offender Registry**

The New York Times reported: <sup>1</sup>

Every 16 hours, a woman in the United States is [fatally shot](#) by a current or former partner. [Intimate partner homicide](#) is one of the [leading causes](#) of death for women in the country, with nearly half of all murdered women killed by a partner.

But there are steps that can be taken to prevent more murders. Repeat offenders are [less likely](#) to kill if they are regularly monitored by law enforcement. In order to closely monitor offenders, all states should create comprehensive batterer databases to track domestic abusers who repeatedly violate restraining orders. Currently, states [vary significantly](#) in [how they handle repeat violations](#). The [failure of law enforcement](#) and district attorney offices to communicate has cost victims [their lives](#).

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence statistics on the problem in Maryland: <sup>2</sup>

- **1,135 Victims Served 555 adult and child victims of domestic violence** found refuge in emergency shelters, transitional housing, hotels, motels, or other housing provided by local programs. 580 adult and child victims received nonresidential supportive services related to transportation, housing advocacy, legal support, therapy, and more.

We track sex offenders in Maryland – but we fail to track domestic violence offenders so that we can reduce these statistics and the risk of injury or death to the victims of that violence.

We can make progress on this problem by passing this bill that will require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to establish and maintain the Domestic Violence Offender Registry.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/30/opinion/domestic-violence-ankle-bracelet.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mnadv.org/resources/maryland-dv-statistics/>

To permit law enforcement to monitor these offenders, the bill will require a certain person convicted three or more times of a certain domestically related crime to register with a certain county sheriff before the person is released, granted probation, granted a suspended sentence, or is not sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

It will obligate the county sheriff to forward all registration information to the Department for maintenance of the Domestic Violence Offender Registry. It has the potential to make a difference in people's lives affected by intimate partner violence.

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**I respectfully urge this committee to return an favorable report on HB0847.**



# **FreeState\_Justice\_HB0847\_FAVORABLE.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ronnie Taylor

Position: FAV



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www.freestate-justice.org

Judiciary Committee  
100 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Tuesday, February 18, 2025

## HB0847 – Criminal Procedure - Domestic Violence Offender Registry

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ronnie L. Taylor, and I serve as the Advocacy, Policy, & Partnerships Director at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization committed to addressing legal and systemic inequities affecting Maryland's LGBTQIA+ community. As a survivor of domestic violence, I am here to express strong support for **HB0847**, which proposes the establishment of a Domestic Violence Offender Registry in Maryland.

**HB0847** aims to tackle the pressing issue of repeat domestic violence offenders by creating a centralized registry. This initiative is particularly significant for marginalized communities, including LGBTQIA+ individuals, who experience intimate partner violence at rates equal to or higher than their heterosexual counterparts. Notably, only one in five survivors of same-sex partner violence seeks orders of protection, often due to fears of discrimination or being outed.

The bill requires individuals convicted three or more times of domestically related crimes to register with their county sheriff. This registry will:

- **Enhance Public Safety:** By providing accessible information about repeat offenders, communities can take informed precautions, potentially reducing further incidents of violence.
- **Support Law Enforcement:** A centralized database aids in monitoring high-risk individuals, facilitating timely interventions.
- **Empower Survivors:** Access to offender information enables survivors to make informed decisions about their safety and legal options.

### LEADERSHIP TEAM

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**Executive Director**

Lauren Pruitt, Esq.  
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**Advocacy, Policy, & Partnerships Director**

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Research indicates a direct correlation between the number of prior convictions and the likelihood of recidivism. Specifically, the probability of reoffending increases from 24% for those with no prior felonies to 61% for individuals with seven prior felonies. This underscores the necessity of monitoring repeat offenders to prevent further abuse.

As a domestic violence survivor, I understand the profound impact such experiences have on one's life. Fear and trauma are often compounded by LGBTQIA+ individuals due to additional layers of stigma and discrimination. Implementing this registry is a vital step toward creating a safer environment for all Maryland residents, ensuring that repeat offenders are known and monitored.

In closing, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0847**. This legislation not only addresses a critical gap in our public safety infrastructure but also reinforces Maryland's commitment to protecting all its citizens, including those in the LGBTQIA+ community.

Best,

*Ronnie L. Taylor*

Ronnie L. Taylor

**Sources:**

1. [\*The LGBTQIA+ community... - Women's Law Center of Maryland / Facebook\*](#)
2. [\*Domestic Violence Reoffending - Public Health Post\*](#)
3. [\*A Decade of Data: Meta-Analysis of Data and Insights on the Experiences of LGBTQIA+ People in Maryland\*](#)
4. [\*2023 DVFRSIT Report\*](#)
5. [\*MD-DVFRSIT 2021-2022 First Annual Report FINAL.pdf\*](#)
6. [\*HRC / Understanding Intimate Partner Violence in the LGBTQ+ Community\*](#)
7. [\*72\\_3\\_6\\_0.pdf\*](#)

## **HB 847 Criminal Procedure - Domestic Violence Offe**

Uploaded by: Catherine OMalley

Position: UNF

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

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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.

## **HB 847 - UNF - House of Ruth.pdf**

Uploaded by: Deena Hausner

Position: UNF



### Domestic Violence Legal Clinic

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Bill No.: House Bill 847  
Bill Title: Criminal Procedure – Domestic Violence Offender Registry  
Committee: Judiciary  
Hearing Date: February 20, 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. House Bill 847 would create a domestic violence offender registry. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to report unfavorably on House Bill 847.**

Although very well-intentioned, this bill has the potential for several unintended consequences that are to the detriment of victims of domestic violence. First, only a small percentage of domestic violence perpetrators are ever convicted, let alone three times. Thus, a registry would under-report and inaccurately reflect the presence of domestic violence in our state and who is perpetrating it. Second, a registry will violate victims' privacy, as the intimate nature of the relationship between perpetrator and victim makes it possible to identify the victim if the perpetrator's identity is public knowledge. Third, this violation of privacy could have a chilling effect and cause victims not to call police or participate in prosecution over concern for the impacts on themselves and/or their children if their identities become known.

**The House of Ruth urges the House Judiciary Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 847.**

# **2025-02-20 HB 847 OPD (UNFAV).pdf**

Uploaded by: Hannibal Kemerer

Position: UNF





**NATASHA DARTIGUE**

PUBLIC DEFENDER

**KEITH LOTRIDGE**

DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

**HANNIBAL KEMERER**

CHIEF OF STAFF

**ELIZABETH HILLIARD**

DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

## **POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**BILL: House Bill 847 – Criminal Procedure – Domestic Violence Offender Registry**

**FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender**

**POSITION: Unfavorable**

**DATE: 02-20-2025**

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Judiciary Committee issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 847, legislation requiring the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to establish and maintain a “Domestic Violence Offender Registry.”

House Bill 947 purports to protect public safety by requiring registration by an individual who has been convicted 3 or more times of a crime of domestic violence, “as defined in Section 4-701 of the Family Law Article” or a crime committed “by a defendant against a victim who had a sexual relationship with the defendant within the 12 months immediately preceding the commission of the crime.” Proposed § 11-1201(b)(1)-(2). If a person is required to register under House Bill 847 and fails to do so, or knowingly provides inaccurate information, that person is guilty of a misdemeanor and, if convicted, subject to a fine not exceeding \$2,000.

The Office of Public Defender’s opposition to this bill is informed by experiences with the Gun Offender Registries and sex offender registries. The “GORA” as it is known in Baltimore City and Prince George’s County has proved far more burdensome than productive.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, sex offender registries do nothing to deter sex offenses and may even exacerbate recidivism:

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<sup>1</sup> The registry requires those who’ve been convicted of a gun offense — such as illegal possession, sale, use or transportation — to register and update their information every six months for three years. Failure to comply is punishable by up to a year in prison and a fine. Studies show that those registries largely fail to prevent future assaults for a variety of reasons. The database is publicly available on the city’s Open

In spite of the laudable goals of legislation establishing registries and requiring public notification, *evidence establishing the effectiveness of these measures in reducing sex crimes is notably lacking*. As a majority of mental health professionals predicted from the outset, *registries have not been effective in reducing the number of sex offenses committed*. Evidence for this is borne out in empirical investigations and scholarly articles on the topic of sex-offender registration laws. The balance of the scholarship concludes that *registration and notification laws are not effective at decreasing recidivism and instead may be increasing recidivism among the targeted population of offenders*.<sup>2</sup>

Registries, like the one proposed in House Bill 847, are a poor substitute for investment in prevention and education. The Centers for Disease Control has highlighted that healthy relationships can be promoted by addressing risk and protective factors at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels.<sup>3</sup>

Before lawmakers create new misdemeanor crimes for failing to register in light of past adjudicated crimes, they should invest resources in communities to protect families and individuals from experiencing domestic violence and providing services to anyone needing protection and healing from domestic violence. Registries based upon criminal convictions have proven wholly ineffective at improving public safety and must resist their implementation

**For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue an unfavorable report on HB 847.**

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**Submitted by: Government Relations Division of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender.**

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Baltimore website. And appearance on it can make it difficult to find housing and work. It also — to borrow an argument from legal gun owners who protest the idea of public databases with their information — can make the individual a target for crime or vigilantism. Almost all of those registered — 95% — are Black men, See <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2022/04/26/is-public-access-to-baltimores-gun-offender-registry-helping-or-hurting-commentary/>.

<sup>2</sup> Molly J. Walker Wilson, The Expansion of Criminal Registries and the Illusion of Control, 73 La. L. Rev. 509, 519 (Winter, 2013) (emphasis added, internal citations omitted).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., <https://www.cdc.gov/intimate-partner-violence/prevention/index.html>.

# **HB 847 - MNADV - UNF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Laure Ruth

Position: UNF



**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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The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the House Judiciary Committee to issue an unfavorable report on HB 847.**

House Bill 847 would create an offender registry for people convicted 3 times for a “domestically related” crime. The Network opposes this bill for a variety of reasons. We have included with this testimony documents from other states and the National Network to End Domestic Violence on why domestic violence organizations are over all against such registries. We urge the members of the Committee to read through them.

First, we have grave concerns about the unintended consequences of such a registry. In domestic violence, once a perpetrator’s name is public, it is relatively easy to discern who the victims or victims are, violating their privacy. Second, since only a small percentage of offenders actually ever enter the criminal justice system, a registry will always significantly underrepresent the number of individuals who are abusive and who may pose a danger to someone and may minimize the danger of an offender who only has one or two convictions. Many domestic violence homicides and violent attacks are perpetrated by people with no prior criminal record. (See NNEDV document attached). Creating a false sense of security for victims or prospective victims is dangerous. Third, true victims are often arrested, and placing them on a registry only makes their lives more difficult, including revealing their address to the actual abuser.

In addition, the designation of a crime being “domestically related” depends on the prosecutor so designating and we have no indication that it is broadly and consistently being done in all jurisdictions. Coupled with pleading down to lesser charges, the number of people on the registry would likely be small, which will give the wrong impression that domestic violence is not a widespread problem. The registry will not illustrate the large number of civil orders of protection sought and granted every year. Not every victim wants to engage with the criminal justice system and this might further chill filing of criminal charges against domestic violence perpetrators.

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For further information contact Laure Ruth ■ Public Policy Director ■ 301-852-3930 ■ [lruth@mnadv.org](mailto:lruth@mnadv.org)

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For the above-stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence** urges an **unfavorable report on HB 847**.

For further information contact Laure Ruth ■ Public Policy Director ■ 301-852-3930 ■ [lruth@mnadv.org](mailto:lruth@mnadv.org)

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## Potential Unintended Consequences of Domestic Violence Offender Registries

Over the last several years, there have been many proposals across the country to create state and/or national registries listing domestic violence offenders. These proposals suggest that such a database will be a preventative tool, increasing safety for potential victims. Unfortunately, there is little evidence demonstrating that a registry of this kind will achieve the desired and intended goals of increasing victim safety and offender accountability. There are also many potential unintended consequences, many of which can decrease safety or have a negative impact on victims. The following are some of these concerns:

- **Creating a False Sense of Security**

Arguments for the registry can be compelling and seemingly logical: to easily and quickly assess if another person could be potentially dangerous based on prior convictions of domestic violence. The registry idea is partly premised upon the assumption that if a person's criminal history is known, then future potential victims can simply avoid the person and any possible harm. However, relying on a registry to determine if a person could be potentially dangerous is ineffective and can create a false sense of security.

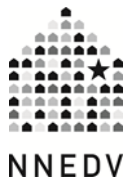
Since only a small percentage of offenders actually ever enter the criminal justice system, a registry will always significantly underrepresent the number of individuals who are abusive and who may pose a danger to someone. Many domestic violence homicides and violent attacks are perpetrated by people with no prior criminal record. Of those who are charged, few are convicted and many plea to a lower offense that would not require them to be listed in the registry. Many registry proposals would only include individuals convicted of a violent felony. This threshold means that not everyone who commits violent domestic violence crimes would be listed. Additionally, many legislative proposals would also require the offender to be convicted at least three times of a domestic violence crime before being listed in the registry. There are many challenges to creating a registry that would be comprehensive and informative enough to be helpful at all, much less a tool for prevention.

- **The Simplicity of the Solution Ignores the Complexity of Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is a complex pattern of power and control. The assumption is that if a person was to find their current or potential love interest listed in a domestic violence registry, they can simply avoid or end the relationship to maintain their safety. This ignores the complexity and context of domestic violence, and the reality that most homicides of women and their children occur when the person is attempting to leave or have left the relationship. Stalking behaviors also significantly increase at the point of a break-up. Breaking off a relationship needs to be a thoughtful process that includes a comprehensive safety plan.

- **Concerns for Victims' Privacy**

Due to the nature of the intimate relationship between a victim and an offender in domestic violence cases, publicizing an offender's name to the public can quickly and easily identify the victim as well. Survivors and their children deserve privacy and should be able to remain anonymous while offenders are held accountable. It has also been well-documented that a concern over privacy can deter victims



## Potential Unintended Consequences of Domestic Violence Offender Registries

from seeking assistance. Not only are victims concerned about their personal privacy, they also face potential consequences from being identified as a victim, including negative social stigmas and the loss of jobs or housing options.

- **Public Shame Can Deter Victims from Calling 911**

The existence of a registry that can act as a public wall of shame can both deter victims from seeking help and raise serious concerns for the safety of those who do. Reporting domestic violence and trying to escape is often the most dangerous time for a victim. Some abusers may retaliate against the victim if their names are included in a public registry. Additionally, many survivors feel concern for their partner and their future. They want the abuse to stop, but they may not want a public disclosure or public shaming to occur. This concern may lead some survivors to not seek assistance at all.

- **Imperfect System = Imperfect Data**

Unfortunately, victims of domestic violence are sometimes arrested after reaching out for help. This may be due to the victim defending themselves or because of challenges in identifying the the primary aggressor. In a study conducted by the National Domestic Violence Hotline, [1 in 4 survivors reported being arrested or threatened with arrest after making a report to police](#). Having victims in the registry will unfairly impact them and challenge the fundamental goal of the registry as a tool for identifying people who may be a danger to others. Victims are statistically extremely unlikely to pose a threat to others.

- **Unnecessary Use of Funds**

In most communities, criminal records are already public and/or available for a fee. Landlords and employers often access these records when conducting a background check. In addition, criminal records are increasingly becoming more readily accessible online. Creating and maintaining a database solely for this purpose is an unnecessary use of limited funds that can be better used serving victims or on effective prevention measures.

- **Minimization of the Epidemic of Abuse**

Some supporters of registries suggest that the existence of a registry will help increase awareness of domestic violence. However, since the vast majority of abusers will never be listed in a registry, either because they never enter the criminal justice system or because the threshold for being included is too high, a registry will not only be an inaccurate reflection of the issue, but could also minimize the prevalence of the crime.

Domestic violence continues to be an epidemic that requires comprehensive and effective responses that will hold offenders accountable, protect victims, and create real prevention. A domestic violence offender registry has many potentially harmful consequences and, regardless of the intended goals, is not a tool for primary prevention. To truly prevent abuse, we need to change social norms that allow and even condone one partner choosing to abuse another partner through power and control.

# NYSCADV

## NEW YORK STATE COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### MEMORANDUM OF OPPOSITION

A.2850-A (Titone)/S.6660 (Nozzolio)

#### VIOLENT OFFENDER REGISTRY BILL: VERSION 3 OF 3

#### BACKGROUND

NYSCADV is opposed to this and other similar legislation (A.9286/S.6658 and A.1833/S.513) because domestic violence offender registries, in any format, have dangerous unintended consequences that thwart their ability to achieve the desired and intended outcome of increasing victim safety and offender accountability. Our concerns about domestic violence offender registries mirror those of our partners across the country, including state domestic violence coalitions and the National Network to End Domestic Violence<sup>1</sup>.

#### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDER REGISTRIES DO NOT CREATE A DETERRENT EFFECT

Similar versions of this legislation have been around since 2008. They have different approaches to the initiating factor that determines who must register. The language in this specific version requires registration as a result of a conviction of a “domestic abuse offense” when the victim is a family or household member. Few abusive individuals would end up on the registry because relying on convictions for these offenses would mischaracterize the number of actual domestic violence offenders. Only a small percentage of domestic violence offenders ever have contact with the criminal justice system. Even fewer face arrest, and of those that are arrested, far fewer are actually convicted. For example, many felony level domestic violence related crimes are plead down to misdemeanors, receive adjournments in contemplation of dismissal (ACOD), or are dismissed.<sup>2</sup>

As an example, in New York City, **of the 75 family related homicides in 2010, 77% of those cases had no known prior police contact and 96% of these cases had no current order of protection**<sup>3</sup>. This shows that a significant portion of those who commit acts of domestic violence will not be identified through a domestic violence offender registry. The registry purports to be a tool that people can use to find out if their partner is unsafe, but in reality, it creates a false sense of security, as it presents the assumption that if a current or prospective partner is not on it, they do not have a history of abuse and are not capable of being abusive.

#### REGISTRIES HAVE A HARMFUL DISPARATE IMPACT ON PEOPLE OF COLOR

We have additional concerns about the over representation of people of color on such a registry, due to the institutionalized racial bias within criminal and court systems. For instance, a 2010 report from Prison Policy Initiative found that in 2010 Blacks and Hispanics made up 34% of the total state population, but represented 74% of the total prison/jail population, while whites made up 58% of the total state population and only represented 26% of the prison/jail population. A 2010 report from the U.S. Sentencing Commission found that in the federal system Black people receive sentences that are 10% longer than White people convicted of the same crimes. And a 2009 report from the Sentencing Project found that the longer a sentence is, the more likely it is that a person of color will be the one getting it: two-thirds of the people in the United States with life sentences were non-white, and in New York, that number rose to 83%. The inherent bias within the criminal and court systems will cause a parallel bias within the registry, further harming communities of color.

#### REGISTRIES ARE RIDDLED WITH HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES FOR VICTIMS & THEIR FAMILIES

Leaving an abuser can be equally if not more dangerous than staying, and should be done thoughtfully and with a well-constructed safety plan. Posting a perpetrator’s name can lead to escalated danger of retaliatory violence by an offender who blames the victim for exposing the abuse to their social circles and to the community in which they reside. An offender registry will also likely create a chilling effect on the reporting of crimes to authorities, and can lead to escalated danger of retaliatory

<sup>1</sup> <http://techsafety.org/blog/2016/5/4/thinking-critically-about-domestic-violence-offender-registries>

<sup>2</sup> Klein, A. (2004). *The criminal justice response to domestic violence*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nyc.gov/html/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2010\\_annual\\_DVFactSheet.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2010_annual_DVFactSheet.pdf)



violence. A 2015 study by the National Domestic Violence Hotline revealed that more than half of the survivors that reached out to the police said they would not call the police again because doing so only made things worse. Offenders already blame victims and retaliate when the police are called. This danger will be intensified when they blame the victim for also exposing the abuse to the community by having their name put on a registry, and the victim's likelihood to call the police for help will be even further reduced. While this bill allows courts to consider a victim's wishes regarding registration of the offender, it is unsafe to put a victim into the precarious position of having to make a decision like this. Abusers often threaten and intimidate victims into dropping charges and not testifying against them.

Victims of domestic violence that reach out for help from law enforcement are arrested at an alarming rate. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline study, 1 in 4 survivors reported being arrested or threatened with arrest after reporting an incident to the police. Survivors may be arrested for protecting themselves against the violence they suffered, or because the officers at the scene arrested both parties. This will likely lead to victims' names being included on the registry. While this version of the legislation does allow court discretion to determine if an offender was defending themselves and is a victim, we remain concerned that this does not sufficiently address the murky issues regarding victim blaming inherent within many criminal and court systems.

### **VICTIM PRIVACY CONCERNS**

Notifying the public about the identity of domestic violence offenders will mean that the domestic violence victims—by nature of the relationship to the offender—cannot remain anonymous (e.g. if the community sees John Doe's name on the registry, they will infer that John Doe's spouse, girlfriend, ex-partner, etc. were likely victimized, infringing upon their privacy and right to confidentiality as victims). This can further isolate victims of domestic violence. For example, if a friend or family member of a victim finds that the victim's abuser is on the registry, they may pressure the victim to leave or blame the victim for entering into or staying in the relationship. Even worse, it is possible that placement on a registry may lead to victims expulsion from housing or employment.

In this specific version of a violent offender registry bill, the person who calls the registry hotline to inquire about someone's status is required to identify themselves and provide a current address which will be maintained in written record. This legislation also creates an internet website allowing this information to public. This creates additional concerns about privacy, confidentiality and potential threats to a victim's safety.

### **THE EXPENSE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDER REGISTRIES DIVERTS LIMITED, CRITICAL FUNDING**

While this particular proposal requires the registered offender to pay small fees when registering and updating their information, there will be a huge cost to the state to create and maintain such a database. The 2012 NYC Bar Association memorandum of opposition to violent offender registries noted that the Senate Finance Committee estimated the registry would cost approximately \$2 million to create, and between \$4.5 and \$5 million to annually maintain, and that these figures did not include the cost of hardware or the costs of additional police/ parole officers needed to implement and monitor the registration of offenders. These expenses incurred by the state would divert critical and already scarce funding from organizations that provide emergency and long term assistance for victims, and that provide primary prevention education within their communities. Fees do not resolve this issue, as so many offenders already do not meet their financial obligations to pay restitution, let alone child support. State resources should be used to support and expand core services for victims, and for primary prevention efforts that confront the attitudes and social norms that allow domestic violence to thrive, rather than to fund initiatives riddled with unintended consequences.

### **INVEST IN PRIMARY PREVENTION**

Providing supportive services to victims of domestic violence and holding offenders accountable are essential components of a community's response to domestic violence. But the reliance on criminal justice strategies and support services for survivors has not reduced the rates of domestic violence in the United States<sup>4</sup>. In order to stem the tide of violence, we must not invest in offender registries, but in efforts that promote broad social change. Evidence based primary prevention strategies stop violence from occurring in the first place. They promote protective factors in youth, challenging the social norms that have allowed domestic and sexual violence to thrive, by using a variety of teaching methods that are both developmentally appropriate and are accessible to multiple learning styles. They incorporate diverse community norms, practices and beliefs, working to stop the violence before it starts. It is in these efforts that New York should invest.

## **NYSCADV opposes this legislation establishing violent offender registries.**

<sup>4</sup> L. Dugan, D. S. Nagin and R. Rosenfeld, Exposure Reduction or Retaliation? The Effects of Domestic Violence Resources on Intimate-Partner Homicide, Law & Society Review, vol. 37:1(2003).



## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDER REGISTRIES

A domestic violence offender registry can *seem* to make sense when identifying ways to address domestic violence. However, the unintended consequences of implementing a registry severely limit any benefits it might have.

Our goal is to ensure victims of domestic violence have an opportunity to safely escape abusive situations while free from the fear of being tracked down by their abusers. For that reason, it is essential to consider the potential harm for victims should their identities and locations be readily accessible via a public database or other public records.

### **Domestic Violence Offender Registry Concerns:**

**Victim Identity:** It is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to publicly identify an abuser without identifying a survivor and their children. According to a National Domestic Violence Hotline law enforcement survey, 60 percent of women indicated they did not want police involvement due to privacy concerns.

**Safety:** Statistically victims of domestic violence are at greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation or after leaving their violent partner. In theory, a registry would allow a person to find their partner in the database and end the relationship to prevent themselves from becoming a victim. However, the risks of assault, stalking, and homicide are greater during the period during and right after a partner has left.

**Underrepresentation:** Domestic violence is significantly underreported and few abusers ever enter the criminal justice system. Of those arrested, many are not convicted, plea down, or are only charged with an offense that would not require reporting under a registry statute.

**Including Victims:** Sadly, victims are sometimes arrested after calling for help, either because they have fought back in self-defense or because both parties have been arrested. Including victims' names in a registry will discourage them from seeking help and runs counter to the intended purpose of a registry.

**Victim Blaming:** Society consistently questions victims to explain their abusers' behaviors rather than holding offenders accountable for their own actions. A registry will further encourage the all-too-common questions of: "Why didn't you leave?" or "Why didn't you check the registry?"

**Cause of Domestic Violence:** Among the many myths surrounding domestic violence is a belief that it is caused by alcohol and drug use, mental illness, or stress. However, domestic violence is caused by a desire to exert power and control over the other partner. While other factors may exacerbate a situation, abusers make a choice to be abusive. Long-term solutions are needed to address the root causes of violence against women and intimate partners, such as prevention programs.

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HON. RICHARD SANDY  
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## MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** House Judiciary Committee  
**FROM:** Legislative Committee  
Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq.  
410-260-1523  
**RE:** House Bill 847  
Criminal Procedure – Domestic Violence Offender Registry  
**DATE:** February 5, 2025  
(2/20)

### INFORMATIONAL COMMENT PAPER

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The Judiciary respects the separation of powers doctrine and acknowledges that the legislature is the policy-making branch. As such, the Judiciary has no position on the policy aims of this legislation and defers to the legislative branch on such matters.

Criminal Procedure § 11-1207 states that a person who would otherwise be required to register under § 11-1204 may petition the circuit court in the county in which the person resides for an order exempting the person from the registration requirements. The circuit court may enter an order exempting a person from the registration requirements if the court finds that: (1) the circumstances of each of the domestically related crimes, in conjunction with the person's criminal history, do not indicate a risk that the person will commit another domestically related crime; and (2) the person is not a danger to others. The circuit court shall specify in writing the reasons for its findings.

The Judiciary notes that it is unclear if these provisions are intended to apply retroactively or just prospectively. If the intent is to be retroactive, the bill would be unworkable. The Judiciary would request language to make it clear the bill is prospective only.

cc. Hon. Aletheia McCaskill  
Judicial Council  
Legislative Committee  
Kelley O'Connor