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Appropriations Committee
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Health and Social Services

Oversight Committee on Pensions



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Maryland General Assembly
Appropriations Committee**

BILL NO: HB847

TITLE: Criminal Procedure - Domestic Violence Offender Registry

HEARING DATE: February 20th, 2025

Greetings, Appropriations Committee. Please see the response to the UNF reports on **HB847**.

Women's Law Center for Maryland

Concerns about Privacy and Loss of Employment

One of the principal arguments against a domestic violence registry is the concern over privacy and the potential stigmatization of individuals listed on such a registry. Women's Law Center of Maryland argues that **HB847**, publicly naming individuals accused or convicted of domestic violence, could lead to social exclusion, blocked employment, and increased likelihood of homelessness. These issues will be addressed by assisting victims with resources that focus on and support primary and secondary prevention.

Education is the best approach to help people recognize abusive behaviors. While the Women's Law Center of Maryland's concerns are valid, not all domestic violence cases go unreported. We know that it is essential to balance the overarching need to protect victims and potential victims of domestic violence. A registry can serve as a preventive measure, providing essential information to individuals who might unknowingly enter relationships with those who have a history of abusive behavior.

- **Concerns about the Criminal Justice System**

The registry can include safeguards to ensure that only those with verified convictions are listed, thus minimizing the risk of unjust stigmatization. Your testimony also has concerns about the three convictions. A person who is in a domestically related crime will have to register after the third offense. This bill aims to increase the penalty for repeat domestic violence offenders. HB847 intends to deter repeated offenders without leading to over-punishment of the offense.

- **Concerns about HB847 Causing Problems in the Family.**

There are many states with various laws and various punishments for this type of behavior, please do not take this bill for granted nor should you think this bill is only to protect women this bill will protect men women, children, and all those who deem

themselves any gender identity. By following in their footsteps, Maryland can join this growing movement and set a new standard in combating intimate partner violence. Problems families can be reduced when acknowledging and identifying abusers. With the passage of this bill, we could affirm our state's commitment to transparency, accountability, and safety.

Maryland Office of the Public Defender

- Concerns of knowingly providing inaccurate information to the police
- Request that lawmakers educate the public about what domestic violence is before creating a new law to punish suspected abusers
- Registries do not deter domestic violence
- MOPD does not think **HB847** will protect the public from abuse due to past experiences with Gun Offender and Sex Registries

Response to Maryland Office of the Public Defender:

While the Maryland Office of the Public Defender's opinion is a noble one, our office must disagree with their scrutinization of HB847. The Office of the Public Defender is correct in their opinion that "investment in prevention and education" are necessary means in preventing domestic violence, though they seemingly fail to recognize an intersection between both addressing risk factors and investing in public safety tools, such as a registry.

While we understand MOPD's concerns with the use a new registry, it is crucial to recognize that sex offenses and domestically related crimes are fundamentally different, and it would be unfair to draw an equivalence between the two. The ineffectiveness of sex offender registries, largely due to the relatively low recidivism rates of sex offenders¹ and their potential to discourage rehabilitation, was something we had acknowledged early in the bill's development.

In contrast, domestic abuse offenders have significantly higher reoffending rates than both general and sex offenders². This bill was specifically designed to target individuals with three or more offenses, focusing on those who have demonstrated a **clear pattern of behavior**. By setting this threshold, the bill ensures that it does not unfairly penalize first-time offenders but instead prioritizes accountability for repeat offenders who pose a continued threat to the community.

¹ Roger Przybylski, "Chapter 5: Adult Sex Offender Recidivism" <https://smart.ojp.gov/somapi/chapter-5-adult-sex-offender-recidivism#:~:text=Sexual%20recidivism%20rates%20orange%20from,have%20different%20rates%20of%20recidivism.>

² Rongqin, et al., "Development and Validation of a Prediction Tool for Reoffending Risk in Domestic Violence" <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10372708/#zoi230741r5>

House of Ruth

- House of Ruth believes the bill has several unintended consequences that will harm victims of domestic violence.

HB847 does not intend to create any implications for the victim or potential victims. This bill does not give a person a false sense of security.

- The House of Ruth letter says that **HB847** will harm the victim because such a low percentage of perpetrators are convicted.

HB847 is not the only reliable tool for people to use when entering friendships or romantic relationships. This database is necessary to protect victims of abuse and repeated offenders.

- The House of Ruth stated in their letter of opposition that **HB847** will reveal the identities of the victims or their children.

This is not true. This bill will require only the offender to register if they have been found guilty of a crime by a jury or judicial officer or if the offender enters a plea of guilty or Nolo Contendere.

- Believes that if a victim is abused, a registry will cause the victim not to report the abuse due to loss of support. This should be addressed through investment and prevention.