

Testimony SB0138 / HB0084

The Path Act

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Hello members of the Judicial Committee,

My name is Aly Williams, and I am writing to express my support for the PATH Act. I currently serve as an Administrative Assistant with Helping Ourselves to Transform (HOTT), an organization dedicated to trauma-informed advocacy, community healing, and justice-centered reform. I respectfully urge you to pass this important legislation.

Through my work at HOTT, I have seen how survivors of domestic violence are often criminalized for actions that are deeply connected to abuse, coercion, and survival. Many justice-involved individuals, particularly Black and Brown survivors, enter the legal system carrying the weight of unaddressed trauma, yet the courts are not always given the tools to fully consider those circumstances when determining a sentence. Too often, punishment is imposed without adequate recognition of the harm that preceded the offense.

The PATH Act addresses this gap by allowing courts to consider domestic violence as a significant contributing factor during sentencing or sentence modification. By formally recognizing survivors' experiences as mitigating factors, this legislation gives judges the discretion to impose sentences that are more just, proportional, and informed by the full context of a person's life.

In my experience working alongside survivors and justice-impacted individuals, I have seen how meaningful consideration of trauma can change outcomes. When the legal system acknowledges the role that abuse and coercion play in criminalized behavior, it opens the door to accountability that does not further punish people for the harm they have already endured.

Passing the PATH Act is an important step toward a justice system that values fairness, dignity, and equity. Allowing courts to weigh evidence of domestic violence at sentencing promotes more individualized decisions, supports long-term stability for survivors, and strengthens public trust in the legal system. It also reflects a responsible and humane approach to sentencing that recognizes both accountability and compassion.

On behalf of the individuals and families we serve, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB0138 / HB0084. Maryland has the opportunity to lead by ensuring that survivors are not punished without their lived realities being fully considered. The PATH Act moves us closer to a system that responds to harm with understanding rather than reflexive severity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

- Aly Williams