



**COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CLUSTER**

February 6, 2026

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB0433 (HB0497) Family Law - Temporary and Final Protective Orders - Duration and Relief Timing

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Chairperson Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission for Women, I request your support for SB0433 (Family Law - Temporary and Final Protective Orders - Duration and Relief Timing). We support this bill because it will help solve one of the most significant barriers women escaping from intimate partner abuse face as they seek crisis housing and medical treatment while simultaneously navigating the legal system's rigorous requirements to secure a Final Protective Order ("FPO") — a lack of sufficient time to do so. SB0433 also makes clear to judges that they may order an abuser to repay the financial losses from destruction of a victim's property, ameliorating the economic burdens that make a victim financially dependent on their abuser.

SB0433 would lengthen the unreasonably short seven-day window between a Temporary Protective Order ("TPO") and an FPO hearing to 14 days, affording petitioners a more realistic chance to meet all procedural requirements to seek a final order while also meeting their needs for crisis assistance. Adding a week will help petitioners address immediate health, housing, and other needs (which may include helping traumatized children), as well as legal needs for the final hearing. Those legal needs include gathering evidence such as police reports, medical records, photographs, and text messages. It may also include securing legal counsel in time for the lawyer to prepare for the hearing and arrange for witnesses to appear. Lengthening this window will also give law enforcement more time to serve the respondent, which is one of the most frequent reasons to reschedule the final hearing. By adding "any form of relief" to the provision that allows judges to order relief necessary to protect the petitioner's safety, the bill will ensure judges can address the true costs of domestic violence that often make survivors more economically vulnerable and dependent on an abuser.

Passing this bill will ensure that survivors of intimate partner violence can meet their needs for legal, physical, emotional, and financial protection on a realistic timeline. Maryland is lagging behind almost every other state in this regard: 48 states currently provide more time than Maryland does between a TPO hearing and an FPO hearing. Women are predominantly the victims of violence by an intimate partner, with 30% of women and 10% of men experiencing stalking, physical assault, or rape by an intimate partner at some point

in their lives. The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) also supports this bill because it addresses the most frequently cited obstacle that lawyers and advocates raised at a Spring 2025 conference. Economic vulnerability and dependence on an abuser can make the difference between a survivor (and affected children) relocating away from an abuser versus returning to the abuser and experiencing additional violence. Ensuring that judges know they can order a respondent to pay for the real financial costs of violence as part of protecting a petitioner's safety is important to ensuring women can maintain independence from their abusers.

Support for SB0156 will **benefit underserved communities** by:

- Allowing low-income victims of abuse who need to seek free or low-cost crisis housing and emergency health services for themselves and their children to focus on those efforts without the untenable pressure of trying to simultaneously secure the documentation and witnesses necessary to obtain an FPO.
- Giving both petitioners and respondents who cannot afford to pay for private attorneys time to secure legal services that may be needed to prepare for an FPO hearing.
- Ensuring that victims of abuse with few financial resources are not forced to return to their abusers due to unsustainable financial losses from the destruction of property, such as a car or cell phone.

Support for SB0156 **will benefit all Marylanders** by:

- Ensuring that Maryland's laws and judicial processes protect its residents from intimate partner violence to the same extent as the 48 states that currently provide more time than Maryland does between a TPO hearing and FPO hearing.
- Ensuring that judges know they can hold respondents in FPO proceedings responsible for the true financial costs of violence, helping to ensure victims can maintain independence from their abusers and reducing incentives for abusers to destroy property.

The Commission's strategic priorities include advocating for laws that promote physical and financial safety for women, and particularly benefit low-income women in underserved communities. This bill furthers our goals, and we urge this Committee's support for SB0433.

Respectfully,



Jodi Danis
Commissioner
Montgomery County Commission for Women