

BILL NO: Senate Bill 0512
TITLE: Criminal Law – Stalking - Penalties
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: February 17, 2026
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is dedicated to ensuring the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women throughout the state. Through direct legal services, policy advocacy, and education, we work closely with survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and with the nonprofit organizations that serve them. Our work gives us a clear view of the persistent and escalating dangers survivors face when abusive individuals continue to harass, monitor, and threaten them, even after court intervention.

For these reasons, the Women's Law Center supports Senate Bill 512. Senate Bill 512 would increase the penalties for individuals convicted of stalking when they are repeat offenders or when the stalking occurs while a protective order for the same victim is in place.

Stalking is often a precursor to even more severe violence, including sexual assault. Research from the U.S. Department of Justice has found that many sexual assaults are preceded by stalking behavior. Stalking itself is also alarmingly common: approximately one in six women and one in seventeen men will experience stalking in their lifetimes. The harm is profound and long-lasting, frequently affecting victims' physical and mental health and contributing to depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. A majority of victims also report experiencing threats of physical harm.

Individuals who continue stalking despite a court order, or who repeatedly engage in stalking behavior, demonstrate a clear disregard for the law and present an elevated risk of future violence. Allowing courts to impose stronger penalties in these cases recognizes the seriousness of that danger, reinforces the authority of protective orders, and can help prevent further harm.

For these reasons, the Women's Law Center of Maryland respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 512.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.