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**BILL NUMBER:** HB 336

**TITLE:** Criminal Procedure – District Court Commissioners and False Statements

**COMMITTEE:** Judicial Proceedings

**HEARING DATE:** 3/31/2026

**POSITION:** FAV W AMENDMENTS

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TurnAround, Inc. is the designated rape crisis center for Baltimore City and Baltimore County and a comprehensive domestic violence service provider. For more than four decades, we have served survivors at the most critical moments of their lives—providing 24-hour crisis response, survivor-centered advocacy, legal referrals, trauma-informed therapy, and prevention education. We also serve as the Regional Navigator for Baltimore and Howard Counties, providing specialized services to survivors of human trafficking. TurnAround is a proud member of the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA), the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV), and the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force.

House Bill 336 would prohibit District Court Commissioners from issuing arrest warrants initiated by individuals other than law enforcement officers or State’s Attorneys, and would increase penalties for false statements to government officials.

While we recognize the intent to strengthen accountability within the system, HB 336 as written would have serious and unintended consequences for survivor safety. It would remove one of the only immediate pathways survivors have to protect themselves and seek justice—placing them at significantly greater risk of harm.

Survivors do not always have safe or viable access to law enforcement. In some cases, abusers actively prevent survivors from contacting police. In others, cases are declined for prosecution—particularly in sexual assault, where underreporting and under-prosecution are well documented. In these moments, the District Court Commissioner system serves as a critical safety valve.

TurnAround routinely supports survivors in filing charges through Commissioners—often alongside petitions for protective orders—when no other avenue is available.

One recent case illustrates what is at stake. TurnAround supported a survivor whose rape case had been declined for prosecution multiple times over a seven-year period. Despite repeated

reinvestigations, the State's Attorney's Office declined to move forward. A national expert later reviewed the case and identified serious investigative failures, including unconstitutional racial bias. Only because a District Court Commissioner approved charges is this case now moving forward in District Court, with the survivor seeking review by a special prosecutor.

Without access to the Commissioner, this survivor would have had no path to justice.

This is not an isolated incident. For many survivors across Maryland, the Commissioner is the only accessible entry point into the criminal justice system.

At the same time, we have seen the devastating consequences of underestimating risk. During this legislative session, a woman in Howard County was murdered within hours after her abuser—who had violated a protective order—was released on his own recognizance by a commissioner. The system determined he was not a danger. Within four hours, she was dead. Commissioners can be the only life line a survivor has.

HB 336 risks creating more situations like this.

If Commissioners are limited to issuing summonses based solely on who initiates the charges, survivors may be forced to alert their abusers that legal action is underway—without any immediate protection in place. This is particularly dangerous given what we know: the moment a survivor attempts to leave or seek help is often the most lethal period.

We agree that reform of the Commissioner system is necessary. However, Maryland must not improve process at the expense of human life.

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### **Suggested Amendments**

TurnAround respectfully recommends:

- Allowing for the immediate issuance of an arrest warrant, with the State's Attorney granted authority to review and withdraw within 72 hours; or
- Requiring expedited judicial review prior to issuance;

In either scenario, an arrest warrant must be available when failure to act would place a survivor at risk of serious bodily harm or death.

HB 336 presents an opportunity to strengthen Maryland's systems—but only if survivor safety remains at the center of reform.

For these reasons, TurnAround respectfully urges the Committee to amend HB 336 to ensure that efforts to improve accountability do not unintentionally endanger survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

For further information, please contact:

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THE BALTIMORE BANNER

# Man charged in fatal Ellicott City stabbing of estranged wife was in custody 4 hours earlier

Dylan Segelbaum and Jess Nocera

2/9/2026 4:57 p.m. EST



Howard County Police responded Sunday morning to a home on Huntsmans Run in a neighborhood off Triadelphia Road in western Ellicott City for a report that

A man who is [accused of stabbing his estranged wife to death](#) Sunday in Ellicott City had been in custody less than four hours earlier on a charge of violating a protective order.

A district court commissioner ordered Alexander Stephenson to be released on his personal recognizance and he walked out of a detention center in Westminster at 4:18 a.m., Carroll County Sheriff Jim DeWees said.

At his initial appearance, Stephenson, 53, of Ellicott City, told the district court commissioner that he served 24 years in the U.S. Army and worked at Leidos as a military planner.

His court-appointed attorney, Angela Holloway, argued that he was not a flight risk or a danger. She said her client disputed that he made the phone calls that constituted the allegations against him.

District Court Commissioner Kotoshia Ade-Oni said she was releasing Stephenson because he did not have a criminal record. But she warned him about the consequences of running afoul of the law.

“Lawfully, you did not do what was right, and you knew that, and you knew the laws and rules,” Ade-Oni said.

“But I do not believe that you’re a danger,” she added. “I believe that you are capable enough to listen to the rules and get yourself together — whatever you need to get yourself together — and make it to court and not recur

these issues that have happened tonight. Understood, sir?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Stephenson responded.

At 8:13 a.m., Howard County Police responded to a home on Huntsmans Run in a small wooded neighborhood off Triadelphia Road for a report that Alexander Stephenson had stabbed his wife, Amethyst Stephenson. She was 47.

“Caller’s advising their dad just stabbed their mom with a small black knife,” a 911 dispatcher can be heard on police radio. “Unknown where the suspect has gone.”

Alexander Stephenson turned himself in at about 10:30 a.m. at a police station in Ellicott City to face charges of first-degree murder and violating a protective order, said Sherry Llewellyn, a Howard County Police spokesperson, in an email.

He was then taken to the Maryland Shock Trauma Center with what police described as non-life-threatening self-inflicted wounds.

It’s unclear who is representing him and when he will appear in court.

**Read more criminal justice stories in Howard County**

- [Man turns himself in after fatally stabbing estranged wife in Ellicott City, police say](#)

- [Howard County judge convicts 19-year-old in double shooting near Columbia mall](#)
- [Howard County's Indian community reels after back-to-back tragedies](#)

Court records help establish a timeline of what led up to the deadly stabbing.

On Jan. 12, Amethyst Stephenson sought a protective order in Howard County Circuit Court against Alexander Stephenson, alleging that he had made “threats of violence” and caused “mental injury of a child.”

“He has made veiled and direct threats of violence against me and the children,” she wrote in her petition. “He has threatened to kill us.”

She asserted that her husband had punched walls and destroyed property, including computers, TVs and iPads.

That day, Circuit Judge Maurice C. Frazier granted a temporary protective order, which was extended several times.

On Feb. 2, Alexander Stephenson agreed to a final protective order, which was effective for two years.

His attorneys in the case, William Prunka and Arya Saleh, could not be reached for comment.

Amanda Denison, Amethyst Stephenson’s attorney, also

Five days later, around 8 p.m. Saturday, the Maryland State Police were called to a High's store on Sykesville Road in Carroll County for a fight taking place inside a vehicle.

Police spoke to an employee who told them that he went outside to figure out what was going on because a car horn had been going off.

The employee saw two people fighting inside an SUV in the parking lot and called police.

Troopers talked to Alexander Stephenson, who they allege smelled like alcohol and admitted to having a couple of drinks. He told police the situation was overblown.

They then spoke with his 17-year-old son, who reported that he had been driving when it became apparent that his father was drunk, so he tried to call his stepmother, Amethyst Stephenson.

That's when Alexander Stephenson grabbed his son's cellphone and threw it out of the moving SUV. The son pulled into the parking lot, where a scuffle ensued as he tried to stop his father from grabbing the vehicle's keys, police allege.

Alexander Stephenson's 14-year-old daughter, who'd been in the back seat, told troopers that her father also scratched her right eye.

stepchildren and reported that her husband tried to call her twice — at 7:43 p.m. and 7:44 p.m. — despite the fact that she had a protective order against him.

Police arrested Alexander Stephenson at 9:43 p.m. on a charge of violating a protective order.

The district court commissioner also approved charges including second-degree assault, malicious destruction of property and intoxicated endangerment, and issued a summons for Alexander Stephenson to appear in court.

He was set to return on April 8 for his trial.

Less than four hours after being released, his wife, who had been so afraid of him that she sought a protective order, was dead.

Under Maryland law, if Alexander Stephenson had faced allegations that he abused or threatened to abuse his wife, a district court commissioner [would not have been allowed to release him.](#)

Amanda Rodriguez, CEO of TurnAround Inc., a domestic violence program and rape crisis center that serves Baltimore City and Baltimore and Howard counties, said she thinks there should be more protections in place for survivors when people are accused of violating a protective order.

Often, Rodriguez said, survivors don't know their abuser has been released, so they lack time to get to a safe

On Monday, Huntsmans Run was quiet. Two packages laid in the snow by the mailbox in front of the home. A few cars were parked outside.

In the petition for protective order, Amethyst Stephenson alleged that her husband had access to weapons, including one handgun in the home as well as several others that were in a storage facility.

She also reported that he had knives.

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# Woman seeks charges in alleged 2018 Randallstown assault after years of refusals

Céilí Doyle

12/24/2025 9:07 a.m. EST, Updated 12/24/2025 9:27 a.m. EST



Shukura has been pushing to hold the man she alleges raped her in 2018 accountable. (Jessica Gallagher/The Banner)

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**Baltimore County District Court to appoint outside**



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Deep in the Baltimore County District Court building in Towson, Shukura nervously tapped her heels on the linoleum floor.

Years of pain and anticipation led the former Baltimore County resident to this moment — her latest push to hold the man she alleges raped her in 2018 accountable.

Would a District Court commissioner reopen her case? And, if so, would a judge agree to assign an outside prosecutor to try the man?

The answer? Yes. And, maybe.

Last week, a court commissioner charged Shukura's former Randallstown housemate with three counts of second-degree rape and second-degree assault and issued a warrant for his arrest.

Shukura said she spent the better part of the past decade pleading with the [Baltimore County State's Attorneys Office](#), county police detectives and even county officials to prosecute the man she says raped her three times in the summer of 2018. At Shukura's request, The Banner is using only her middle name because it does not identify survivors of sexual assault without their consent.

On Friday, county State's Attorney Scott Shellenberger and his deputy, John Cox, responded to the 44-year-old's efforts to hold the man accountable by asking the court to dismiss the case.

In a filing later that day, Shukura's attorney, [Robbie Leonard](#), requested the judge appoint a special prosecutor from outside Baltimore County to litigate the case. Leonard, who ran against Shellenberger in 2022, but is not next year, argued that neither the state's attorney nor his deputies could be trusted to prosecute the case on behalf of his client, a Black woman.

"[The office] has acted with **unconstitutional bias, inconsistent and shifting legal justifications**, and **professionally inappropriate conduct** in their refusal to prosecute the perpetrator



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On Saturday, [District Court Judge Dorothy Wilson](#) granted Shellenberger's request to dismiss and quashed the arrest warrant, but she reversed her decision Monday after reviewing Leonard's petition.

Court records now show that a hearing will be scheduled for Wilson to listen to both Leonard and Shellenberger before deciding.

"All of this is painful, of course," Shukura said. "But this is the greatest victory in seven and a half years of fighting for justice."

After reviewing Shukura's petition, a District Court judge is scheduled to listen to both Leonard and Shellenberger before deciding whether to allow prosecution of the case. (Jessica Gallagher/The Banner)

## How did we get here?

Anyone can [ask a District Court commissioner to charge someone](#) they say committed a crime.

The commissioner's lobby is similar to the Motor Vehicle Administration — down to the plastic blue chairs and bank teller-esque counter window.

On Thursday, Shukura raised her right hand there and swore she was telling the truth in her application to charge the man. Twenty minutes later a commissioner said the case was reopened.

Her advocate, [Amanda Rodriguez](#), CEO of the nonprofit TurnAround, which [assists survivors](#) of sexual and domestic violence and human trafficking, embraced Shukura.



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In multiple interviews Shukura described how her former housemate raped her inside the Randallstown home where they rented separate rooms on June 19, June 21 and July 3 in 2018.

Initially, Shukura refused to move out, rationalizing in her traumatized state that leaving would grant him power.

“He already raped me and that was so humiliating and this was some random dude. He’s not my spouse or boyfriend ...,” Shukura said. “If I run away and move out, then I’m giving him even more power.”

She changed her mind after considering he could endanger others and reported the alleged rapes to Baltimore County police on July 22, 2018.

Police conducted an investigation, but Lisa Dever, then an assistant state’s attorney, declined to charge the man.

Shukura pressed her case, but Cox and Shellenberger also declined to charge the man over the next several years.

Shukura said that Shellenberger told her in a virtual meeting in September 2021 that he believed her, but could not offer more.

“He said: ‘I believe you, but a jury won’t,’” Shukura recalled.

In an interview with The Banner, Shellenberger said he did not want to address specifics because the case is pending.

During a Southwest Baltimore County Democratic Club town hall in May 2022, Shukura asked Shellenberger if he believed she was raped, according to the petition.

“I do not believe we can prove your case,” he told Shukura. “I do not believe the facts that you revealed the first time to the police amount to a crime in the state of Maryland.”



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On Friday, county State's Attorney Scott Shellenberger and his deputy responded to Shukura's efforts to hold the man by asking the court to dismiss the case. (Paul Newson/The Banner)

Two years later, John Magee, chief of the State's Attorney's Office's Child Abuse and Sex Offense Division negated that previous position and presented Shukura's case in July 2024 to a grand jury, which declined to indict the man.

"This lack of transparency, coupled with the office's contradictory statements, raises serious concerns about the good faith of the prosecution," Leonard wrote in his petition for outside counsel.

## **'Unconstitutional discrimination and bias'**

Shukura said she believes Shellenberger's office would have treated a white woman differently.



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In the petition, Leonard argues that the state's attorney's office violated his client's constitutional rights and discredited her during the grand jury proceedings.

"Lisa Dever, the first prosecutor to review the Petitioner's case, explained ... she could not prosecute due to her belief that a jury would not believe the Petitioner because she is a Black woman," wrote Leonard, [citing a Baltimore Sun article](#) from July 2022 in which Dever defended her actions.

Dever, whom Shellenberger promoted to the second-highest position in his office, told The Sun she once had a sexual assault case where a juror convinced the rest of the jury not to convict a Black man who reminded her of her son because "all Black women lie," and the victim was a Black woman.

Dever said that shows how prosecutors' must factor in jurors' previous experiences.

"This rationale is fundamentally flawed," Leonard wrote. "By her logic, if a prosecutor cannot prosecute a case without knowing jurors' past experiences or what they will bring to a case, the prosecutor is unable to bring charges. *If this argument is true, no prosecutor could ever move forward on any case.*"

Shellenberger did not address Dever's comments, but said multiple prosecutors in his office reviewed Shukura's case and determined there was insufficient evidence to arrest the man.

"I believe we've made the right decisions throughout this case," he said. "This office handles all their cases fairly and impartially, and that is what we did in this case."

Shellenberger emphasized that Magee brought Shukura's case in front of a grand jury, Shukura had the opportunity to testify and jurors decided not to charge.



Rodriguez, a former Baltimore County assistant state's attorney, said it makes no sense that a grand jury didn't indict because the evidence — including a witness statement from another housemate who overheard Shukura resist the man's advances — was overwhelming.

She also doesn't understand why the office refused to prosecute the case.

"It's the million-dollar question," Rodriguez said. "It's really concerning to me that there has not been a clear answer and that's something I think [Shukura] deserves."

## Repeat offenders

This case is [not the first time](#) the state's attorney's office has been accused of [mishandling sexual assault cases and survivors](#).

Baltimore County and the state of Maryland paid sexual assault survivor Anna Borowski \$100,000 in 2022 to [settle a lawsuit](#) in which she claimed Shellenberger and county police detectives violated her First Amendment rights.

Amid complaints that county police and the state's attorney were not properly handling sexual assault cases, County Executive [Johnny Olszewski Jr. established](#) the [Sexual Assault Investigations Task Force](#) in 2019.

The task force [found that county law enforcement](#) was reluctant to pursue cases if women could not prove they physically resisted their assailants.

Roland Patterson Jr., president of Baltimore County's NAACP branch, said Shukura's case is the latest example of a pattern of racism and sexism by the state's attorney's office.



“It’s a double misfortune that [Shukura’s] crime and her victimization had to happen in [Baltimore County],” Patterson said. “It’s a shame she had to suffer in this county, because in this county, she suffered twice.”

Rodriguez explained that many survivors want a judge or jury to review their case to provide closure, and Shukura’s case exemplifies just how difficult that is to achieve.

“We are still not — as a society — acknowledging the trauma of sexual violence and we know ... that so few of these cases are even reported ... and then even less are actually charged and even less are actually prosecuted and even less are actual convictions,” she said.

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## Céilí Doyle

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Céilí Doyle is a regional reporter covering Baltimore County. She comes to Maryland from Texas, where she previously worked as a housing affordability and regional reporter at the Houston Landing.



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