



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 84- Criminal Procedure - Sentencing - Domestic Violence as a Mitigating Factor (Providing Alternatives Through Healing for Justice-Involved Individuals (PATH) Act)

To: Delegate Sandy Bartlett, Chair and the Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Karen “Candy” Clark, Lead Advocate Criminal Justice Reform
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry-Maryland
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Unitarian Universalists value equity and justice. We believe that every person is inherently worthy and has the right to flourish with dignity, love, and compassion. We know that in order for true justice to be served, every aspect of a person must be considered. Their underlying motivations, their history, their justifications—all of it influences why people do the things they do, and if the purpose of the criminal justice system is to heal and rehabilitate these people, then those influences have to be addressed in their treatment.

This is why the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland supports **HB 84 - Criminal Procedure - Sentencing - Domestic Violence as a Mitigating Factor (Providing Alternatives Through Healing for Justice-Involved Individuals (PATH) Act)**. This bill supports the victims of domestic or intimate partner violence, a serious crime that affects one in four women and one in seven men in Maryland per the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence 2023 report. Many organizations provide aid to those affected. However the effects of domestic violence impact the lives of the victims forever.

The Path Act addresses the situation in which a person who is a victim of domestic violence retaliates by committing a crime against the perpetrator. Many of whom have been serving prison sentences for their “crime.” Some of these “criminals” have received sentences that were longer than the sentences of their abusers’.

The Path Act brings justice to this situation. The victim must establish evidence that the domestic violence was a significant factor that motivated the victim to act against their abuser. If the courts find this to be a factor for the defendant of the crime, the court may impose changes in the victims sentencing like reducing a mandatory sentence, or can depart from sentence guidelines.

Currently, a unique pilot program is being implemented in which 25-50 incarcerated

women survivors of domestic violence are involved in a rehabilitative mentorship program developed by HOTT (Helping Ourselves to Transform). It provides them a fair and transparent pathway to early release to reintegrate back into their communities.

We ask you to stand on the side of love and justice.

Please support **HB - 84** .

Thank you,

Karen "Candy" Clark

Criminal Justice Reform Lead Advocate