



MARIAN HOUSE

Women Moving from Dependence to Independence

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 84

February 3, 2026

Marian House strongly supports HB 84, which will permit the introduction of evidence of domestic violence before the court, on behalf of a defendant, stating that domestic violence was a significant contributing factor in the defendant's crime. If this bill is enacted, it will allow the court to render a sentence that is less than the mandatory minimum sentence required by law, below sentencing guidelines, or that is just and appropriate in light of the victims' circumstances, should they find that domestic violence was a major contributing factor in their crime.

Marian House is a holistic community that provides women and their children with housing and comprehensive, wrap-around support services. The majority of the women at Marian House were previously displaced and in antagonistic, unstable environments as a result of domestic violence. Marian House provides a safe, sober, and loving environment that challenges women to respect and love themselves, confront emotional and socioeconomic barriers, and transition to stable and independent lives.

Through HB 84, Maryland's legal system takes an evidence-based step toward recognizing the impact of trauma on criminal conduct and avoiding the further penalization of victims. By allowing courts to acknowledge and consider the abuse and trauma that contributed to an offense, the bill provides more meaningful support to justice-involved victims. HB 84 recognizes the profound challenges these individuals have faced and may continue to endure, elevating their experiences in contrast to current law, which too often leaves victims feeling diminished, defeated, and unsupported.

The psychological effects of domestic violence weigh heavily on victims. Victims of domestic violence often have increased levels of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These mental fatigues significantly impair a victim's ability to think clearly, regulate emotions, and make safe and/or rational decisions¹. It is crucial that these factors are taken into consideration during sentencing, as they hold such a large influence on the victim during the time of their crime.

The current carceral system hosts a population that is disproportionately more likely to have been a victim of domestic violence.² Acknowledging this reality, Maryland has an opportunity to meaningfully support victims by promoting sentencing that accounts for the extenuating circumstances and pressures they faced. This reform would transform the legal experience for justice-involved victims by affirming that individuals should not be further punished for the abuse they have endured and assist in breaking the cycle of domestic violence.

Marian House is eager to support the PATH Act. For over forty-three years, Marian House has been serving women reentering the community from Maryland's carceral system, many of whom spent years or decades incarcerated for offenses committed under coercion by an abuser or in self-defense. HB 84 represents a critical step toward justice, helping to dismantle the barriers that too often punish victims for the abuse they endured and creating a path toward healing, safety, and empowerment.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rebecca L. Perry

Interim Chief Executive Officer / Chief Operating Officer

RLP/np

¹ Lausi, G., Burrai, J., Baldi, M., Ferlazzo, F., Ferracuti, S., Giannini, A. M., & Barchielli, B. (2023). Decision-Making and Abuse, What Relationship in Victims of Violence? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(10), 5879. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20105879>

² Morgan, R. E., & Kena, G. (2018). *Criminal Victimization, 2016: Revised* (NCJ 252121). Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv16_old.pdf