

BILL NO: House Bill 0084
TITLE: Criminal Procedure - Sentencing - Domestic Violence as a Mitigating Factor
(Providing Alternatives Through Healing for Justice-Involved Individuals (PATH)
Act)
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 5, 2026
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland supports HB 84 because it addresses a profound injustice faced by many survivors of intimate partner violence—particularly women and women of color—who are incarcerated for acts directly connected to surviving abuse, while their abusers often face little or no accountability.

Survivors who are criminalized for protecting themselves or attempting to escape violence often enter the criminal legal system as a direct result of coercion, control, and prolonged abuse. HB 84 recognizes that intimate partner violence is a critical mitigating factor in these cases and ensures that the legal system can take the full context of a survivor's circumstances into account.

By explicitly recognizing the role of abuse in survivors' involvement with the criminal legal system, HB 84 promotes fairness, proportionality, and accountability. Considering intimate partner violence as a mitigating factor supports more just outcomes and helps prevent survivors from being punished more harshly than their abusers for survival-based actions.

HB 84 is particularly impactful for communities of color. Black and Brown women are disproportionately affected by both intimate partner violence and the criminal legal system, and are more likely to be incarcerated for actions directly related to abuse. These disparities are rooted in systemic inequities, including racial bias in policing, prosecution, and sentencing, as well as limited access to supportive legal resources.

By centering the lived experiences of survivors and recognizing abuse as a mitigating factor, HB 84 advances racial equity, promotes survivor-centered justice, and helps disrupt cycles of violence and incarceration that have long harmed families and communities of color.

For these reasons, the Women's Law Center of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 84.

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.