



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

The Maryland House of Delegates, 6 Bladen Street, Room 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3185 • 800-492-7122 Ext. 3185 • Black.Caucus@house.maryland.gov

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Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 84/ Senate Bill 138 - Criminal Procedure - Sentencing - Domestic Violence as a Mitigating Factor (Providing Alternatives Through Healing for Justice- Involved Individuals (PATH Act)). This trauma-informed legislation advances fairness in sentencing, strengthens public safety, and recognizes the profound and lasting impact that domestic violence can have on individuals who later become involved in the criminal justice system.

House Bill 84/ Senate Bill 138 acknowledges that survivors of domestic violence often experience long term physical, emotional and psychological trauma that can significantly influence behavior, decision-making, and mental health.

When that trauma goes unrecognized within the justice system, survivors may face disproportionately harsh outcomes that fail to address the root causes of their involvement. By allowing courts to consider documented experiences of domestic violence as a mitigating factor during sentencing, the PATH Act promotes individualized justice while maintaining accountability.

This legislation is particularly important for Black Marylanders and other marginalized communities, who are disproportionately impacted by both domestic violence and the criminal legal system. Structural inequities, limited access to trauma-informed services, and over-policing have resulted in survivors' experiences often being overlooked or misunderstood during sentencing. **House Bill 84/ Senate Bill 138** helps address these disparities by empowering judges to consider the full context of a person's lived experience and by encouraging responses that emphasize healing and rehabilitation rather than punishment alone.

Additionally, **House Bill 84/ Senate Bill 138** supports evidence-based alternatives to incarceration that improve long-term public safety outcomes. Trauma-responsive sentencing practices have been shown to reduce recidivism by connecting justice-involved individuals to counseling, behavioral health services, and supportive programming that address underlying harm. These approaches not only benefit survivors, but also strengthen families and communities by breaking cycles of violence and incarceration.

Ultimately, **House Bill 84/ Senate Bill 138** reflects Maryland's commitment to a justice system that is fair, restorative, and grounded in human dignity. Recognizing domestic violence as a mitigating factor does not excuse criminal conduct; rather, it ensures that sentencing decisions are informed, proportional, and aligned with best practices that promote accountability, healing, and community stability.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland asks this Committee to vote favorably on **House Bill 84/ Senate Bill 138**.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland