



## Reproductive Health Protection Act

**Bill Number:** TBD

**One Sentence Synopsis:** This legislation will create protections in our laws for pregnant individuals seeking abortion care, as well as those providing support to pregnant individuals (including health care providers, support organizations, and volunteers), from civil, criminal, and administrative liability.

**Committees:** Senate Judicial Proceedings, Senate Finance, House Judiciary, House Health and Government Operations

**Lead Sponsors:** Senator Will Smith, Delegates Nicole Williams, and Delegate Terri Hill

**Lead Group:** Women's Law Center of Maryland

**Lead Group Contact:** Michelle Siri, Executive Director

**Describe the problem:**

In the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health in overturning Roe v. Wade, it is anticipated that nearly half the states will outlaw or severely restrict the right to abortion care. As of October 14, 2022, fourteen states have banned nearly all abortion care, and some of those states have enacted laws that create liability for anyone assisting their residents obtain abortion care even in states where abortion remains legal. These laws are designed to intimidate people seeking abortion care, as well as volunteers and health care providers supporting out-of-state patients. The Reproductive Health Protection Act will counteract these extreme efforts by ensuring patients, providers, and support networks cannot be subject to criminal, civil, or administrative penalties within Maryland for supporting the provision of abortion care.

**Describe your proposed legislation:**

This shielding bill will protect individuals seeking abortion care in Maryland from criminal, civil, and administrative liability from their home states. It will also support continued access to care for Maryland residents by ensuring health care providers and supportive organizations can continue to operate without legal threats from other states.

**Benefit to Communities of Color:**

Yes. Communities of color are particularly impacted by limitations on abortion access. As we know, significant racial and ethnic disparities persist for a wide range of health outcomes, from diabetes to heart disease to breast and cervical cancer to sexually transmitted infections (STI), including HIV. This is also true for unintended pregnancies. Unnecessary barriers to abortion care increase costs and wait times, further exacerbating existing health disparities and economic injustices. The criminal justice system has been disproportionately abused to negatively impact People of Color and empowering citizenry in states to target anyone who has received or is suspected of receiving or providing abortion care increases the very real risks to those communities.



## Declaration of Rights - Right to Reproductive Liberty

**Bill Number:** TBD

**One Sentence Synopsis:** This legislation will lead to a ballot measure to create a constitutional amendment to protect the rights of individuals to make their own reproductive health decisions in Maryland.

**Committees:** Senate Finance, House Health and Government Operations

**Lead Sponsors:** House Speaker Adrienne Jones

**Lead Group:** Planned Parenthood of Maryland

**Lead Group Contact:** Robyn Elliott

**Describe the problem:**

In the months following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health, which overturned the seminal case Roe v. Wade after nearly 50 years, we have already seen 14 states ban almost all abortion care, with another 9 poised to enact restrictions so severe as to essentially prohibit any abortions in those states. Many in Maryland think of our state as a "safe state" and that we are immune from the impact of the Dobbs decision. It is true that we are safer than states like Texas which have enacted a near total abortion ban or our neighboring state of West Virginia which has banned abortions at all stages of pregnancy. But the truth is that our statutory protections only create a legal buffer against the erosion of our rights in Maryland.

Marylanders' reproductive freedom has historically been protected by a layering of Maryland law, Maryland's constitution, federal law, and the U.S. Constitution. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court no longer recognizes that the fundamental right to privacy protects our ability to make our own reproductive health provisions, leaving the decision to regulate abortion up to individual states without the additional constitutional protection. This means Maryland's statutory right to abortion is vulnerable, as well as other rights related to privacy that we take for granted here. Campaigns in other states to erode abortion rights have lasted decades, with incremental changes gained slowly over long periods of time. Dobbs was not overturned overnight but was part of a decades-long operation to overturn Roe v. Wade. While we are confident in our legislature's ability to maintain our right to reproductive freedom it would be foolish to believe that ability will last indefinitely.

Furthermore, the right to privacy was recognized not just in the landmark case of Roe v. Wade. It has also been the underpinning of cases like Griswold v Connecticut in which the Court found in 1965 that married couples had a fundamental right to privacy to make their own birth control decisions. And in 1972, the Court reaffirmed the right to privacy to make birth control decisions and extended those rights to unmarried couples through the Court's findings in Eisenstadt v. Baird. Due to the Court's decision in Dobbs, we are witnessing the most rapid unraveling of civil rights in our lifetime. And it's not

just abortion at stake. Even our rights to make birth control decisions may be at risk because so many prior U.S. Court decisions depend on the legal underpinning of the right to privacy. Indeed, Justice Clarence Thomas, in his concurrence in the Dobbs case stated “in future cases, we should reconsider all of this Court’s substantive due process precedents, including Griswold, Lawrence, and Obergefell. Because any substantive due process decision is ‘demonstrably erroneous.’” Thus, Dobbs could be just the first case in a long list of cases designed to constrict our reproductive freedoms and civil liberties.

**Describe your proposed legislation:**

This legislation would enable a ballot measure to constitutionally enshrine the rights of Marylanders to reproductive freedom. Specifically, the bill recognizes that a central component of an individual’s rights to liberty and equality includes the fundamental right to reproductive liberty. This includes the right to make decisions and choices regarding their own reproduction, including decisions related to preventing, continuing, or terminating a pregnancy. Significantly, the bill also states that those rights may only be abridge if “justified by a compelling state interest achieved by the least restrictive means.” A constitutional amendment is the strongest protection we could provide to ensure future generations of Marylanders have meaningful access to the full range of reproduction health care, from birth control to infertility treatments, to abortion. And by including a strict scrutiny standard, i.e., by explicitly requiring that the “state may not, directly or indirectly, deny, burden, or abridge the right unless justified by a compelling state interest achieved by the least restrictive means,” we would ensure that the right to reproductive liberty is unequivocal.

**Benefit to Communities of Color:**

Yes. Communities of color are particularly impacted by limitations on abortion access. As we know, significant racial and ethnic disparities persist for a wide range of health outcomes, from diabetes to heart disease to breast and cervical cancer to sexually transmitted infections (STI), including HIV. This is also true for unintended pregnancies. Unnecessary barriers to abortion care increase costs and wait times, further exacerbating existing health disparities and economic injustices. The criminal justice system has been disproportionately abused to negatively impact People of Color and empowering citizenry in states to target anyone who has received or is suspected of receiving or providing abortion care increases the very real risks to those communities.



## Access to Reproductive Healthcare at Public Institutes of Higher Education

**Bill Number:** TBD

**One Sentence Synopsis:** Requires public institutions of higher education to develop policies that guarantee students access to emergency contraception and medicated abortion.

**Committees:** TBD

**Lead Sponsors:** Delegate Ariana Kelly

**Lead Group:** Maryland NOW

**Lead Group Contact:** Jakeya Johnson- Legislative Task Force Chair

**Describe the problem:**

Many college campuses have little to no access to essential reproductive healthcare resources. In cases of sexual assault, unprotected or coerced sex, and failed birth control, on campus access to emergency contraception and medicated abortion is an important way for students to maintain bodily autonomy and prevent unwanted pregnancy in a timely and private manner. Access off campus presents barriers such as limited health center pharmacy hours, transportation challenges, high pharmacy costs, pharmacies not stocking EC on the shelf, enforcing outdated age restrictions, or refusing to sell EC outright.

**Describe your proposed legislation:**

Public Colleges and universities will be required to develop and implement a plan to offer on site access to emergency contraception, contraceptive counseling and medicated abortion. By improving access to reproductive healthcare on campus, women will be better suited to achieve their personal, professional and educational goals without the threat of unplanned pregnancy.

**Benefit to Communities of Color:**

Yes. Statistically women of color have lesser access to healthcare resources and are more likely to not finish college due to unplanned pregnancy. Providing reproductive healthcare resources to these women is an incredibly important step in addressing the multifaceted injustices in both poverty and healthcare.



## Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act (CCEJ)

**Bill Number:** TBD

**One Sentence Synopsis:** The Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act (CCEJ) will help meet Maryland's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction plan to meet net-zero emissions by 2045, in a just and equitable way by enhancing resilience to climate impacts; demanding accountability from fossil fuel companies by charging them a fee for the damages they are causing; using the revenue from the fee to help protect low- and moderate-income (LMI) households from financial harm; and aiding county and municipal governments in developing local Climate Action Plans.

**Committees:** TBD

**Lead Sponsors:** Senator Benjamin Kramer, Delegate Fraser-Hidalgo

**Lead Group:** Rebuild Maryland Coalition (Climate XChange Maryland)

**Lead Group Contact:** Wandra Ashley-Williams Regional Director, Climate XChange Maryland

### **Describe the problem:**

Climate change is one of the greatest global challenges of the twenty-first century. Based on the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), people who are already most vulnerable and marginalized experience the greatest impacts. Climate change also reflects racial disparities and the widening gulf between rich and poor. Low- and moderate-income (LMI) communities are hit the worst by the climate crisis. A large percentage of such households are families of color and rural family households many of which are headed by women.

Women's vulnerability to climate change stems from several factors - social, economic, and cultural. Although climate change is a collective problem, women are increasingly observed as more vulnerable than men to the effects of climate change and its burdens. Accordingly, phenomena such as displacement, homelessness, poverty, sexual violence, and disease weigh more heavily on women and girls.

### **HEALTH DISPARITIES in WOMEN and CHILDREN:**

When you hear reasons for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Maryland, you often hear about investment in clean energy, better preparation for sea-level rise or flooding or even securing federal funding for investments in a clean energy future. These are crucial benefits to reducing carbon in Maryland. But they are just part of the positive impacts realized if we pass strong climate solution policies in the state. As we strive to move towards a pollution free environment, we must consider how to reduce the negative health effects of harmful air pollutants and to make this move a just transition.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists 2019 position paper states that “climate change is an urgent women’s health concern as well as a major public health challenge.” Continuous exposure to fossil fuels often leads to detrimental health effects for women, such as infant mortality, chronic bronchitis, and worsening of cardiac disease. Poor air quality can trigger asthma attacks, and elevated blood lead levels in children can cause developmental disabilities. These adverse health effects are most consequential to at-risk populations, which include a high number of pregnant women and developing fetuses.

During pregnancy, if a woman has higher exposure to these elements, they have a higher risk of preterm birth, low birthweight, and stillbirth. Birth weights have declined as rates of natural gas production have increased, according to a first-of-its-kind study conducted by Summer Sherburne Hawkins, an associate professor at the Boston College School of Social Work. She concludes that, “With our study, we’re able to say that this is not unique to a specific state but is true across the country.” Because housing and zoning policies are rooted in systems of racial inequity, African American mothers are at highest risk for these outcomes, which also means that policies that reduce air pollution burden will have the greatest benefit for these communities.

**CHILDREN** and **TEENAGERS** face greater risk of infection, coughing and bronchitis from air pollution. Growing up breathing high air pollution may even affect how children’s lungs develop. Children and teens can be more active when they are outdoors, so they may inhale more pollution, putting them at greater risk of lung disease as they age. American Lung Association <https://www.lung.org/clean-air/outdoors/who-is-at-risk>

Nationally, asthma is a leading cause of chronic school absenteeism. The Maryland Department of Health reports that asthma is the most common chronic condition in Maryland schoolchildren, affecting more than 60,000 students statewide. When kids miss school from asthma, they risk falling behind in their studies and in many cases it also means that parents miss days of work (and income) or have to pay for unanticipated child care. Air pollution can also affect cognitive development in young children.

Climate solutions are health solutions. Not just on a global scale, but climate action has local health benefits. Strong climate legislation, such as the Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act, will improve the health of all Marylanders now and for generations to come.

**Describe your proposed legislation:**

The destructive impacts of climate change to Maryland’s lands, history, and economy, as well as to the health, traditions, and prospects of its people, now constitute an existential climate crisis. The Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act (CCEJ) addresses these threats to Maryland with transformative, market-based solutions.

The CCEJ incentivizes the reduction of fossil fuel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and its passage would put Maryland on a commonsense, practical pathway toward a sustainable, vibrant economy. It will generate billions of dollars for investment in clean energy infrastructure, all while providing protective benefits to Maryland’s trade-exposed small businesses and most vulnerable populations: LMI households. Climate justice as well as racial/gender and environmental justice are inextricably intertwined and provide the foundation for policies designed to rebuild Maryland’s economy.

In addition, the CCEJ establishes two types of fossil fuel fees: 1) non-transportation fuel fee (Building Heat); and 2) transportation fuel fee (Gas). Revenue from these fees will be used to establish two separate funds:

Benefit Fund - 50% of the total revenue will go to LMI households and energy-intensive trade-exposed (EITE) businesses to protect them from financial harm.

1. The Household Benefits Account - 80% of the money in the Benefit Fund will go to LMI households.
2. The Employer Benefit Account - 20% of the money in the Benefit Fund will go to EITE.

Infrastructure Fund - 50% of the total revenue will go to invest in initiatives that improve the health and welfare of the citizens of the State.

1. At least 50% of the infrastructure account shall be invested in projects that are directly located within and provide meaningful benefits to environmental justice communities.
2. 50 % of the infrastructure fund shall be disbursed to qualified county and municipal governments for projects to mitigate GHG and build resilience.
3. Up to 5% of the infrastructure account shall provide technical assistance, capacity, and planning tools to county and municipal governments to develop qualified local climate plans and investment proposals.

Those who are most affected by climate change including women, girls and marginalized communities will qualify for the benefits of these funds. While addressing climate risks and mitigating their consequences must be among the state's top priorities, we must ensure that these vulnerable communities are protected from any additional costs in the transition to a clean energy economy.

#### How Will Women Benefit from This Legislation?

First, setting new statewide, greenhouse gas emission reduction goals to 60% by 2040 and net-zero emissions by 2045, will reduce the negative impacts on the public health, economic well-being, and natural treasures of the State. This reduction will greatly reduce the negative health effects of women and children.

Second, the CCEJ will make polluters pay for the damage they cause by charging a fee that will increase annually until the target reduction is met. The revenue from the fee is currently projected to be at least \$1B annually. Two funds will be established with the revenue from the fee – the Benefits Fund and the Infrastructure Fund as described above. These funds will be directed to the same vulnerable households and communities including women as indicated in the 2021 Maryland Women - A Status Report data listed below.

Third, Half of the Benefits Fund (\$500M) will go directly to low-income households – to the pocketbook of women in LMI communities. They will receive regular rebates to pay their utility bills, pay for their prescription drugs, put gas in their car, pay for public transportation, or spend however they choose. Half of the Infrastructure Fund will be directed to the same community to help them move into this green environment we are creating. Some people can afford to put solar panels on their roofs, purchase electric cars, protect their homes from flooding, or move to a less polluted community. Some of our citizens cannot. The Infrastructure Fund provides funding to those communities to ensure everyone has a just transition. Women and children living in those communities will qualify for those funds.

Here is some Maryland specific data. The Maryland Commission for Women 2021 Maryland Women – A Status Report indicates that:

- Women and girls represent more than 51% (3.1 million) of the population in Maryland.

- 49% of Marylander's workforce are female
- 60% of minimum wage workers are women – nearly 6 in 10 minimum wage workers in Maryland are women.
- Women's average earnings are less than men's at every education level (\$58,245 male vs \$44,988 female overall earnings) and (\$106,133 male vs \$75,625 female with graduate degree)
- Of mothers employed outside the home in Maryland, 29.5% are married and 20% are not married with children under 6
- 23% of single female-headed households with children under 18 live in poverty

**Benefit to Communities of Color:**

The disproportionate death toll from COVID-19 among African Americans and Latino Americans has reaffirmed longstanding inequities in health and access to care. Low and moderate income (LMI) communities are the worst affected by the climate crisis. A large percentage of such households represent families of color and rural family households, many of which are headed by women.

These vulnerable, struggling communities must receive resources for recovery from COVID-19 and the climate change crisis in general. Sufficient revenues must be allocated to ensure that the vast majority of LMI households do not experience increases in their cost of living because of the policy. The CCEJ Act will establish the Household and Employer Benefit Fund which will direct 50% of the revenue generated from the GHG pollution fees collected to LMI households to substantially increase protection. To further protect impacted households, fees charged may not be passed through as a direct cost to an end user of a fossil fuel or a customer of a gas company. The CCEJ Act has been designed to DO NO HARM.

The CCEJ Act specifically states that every investment in communities must help to eliminate racial injustice. The bill will create the Climate Crisis Infrastructure Fund to invest in projects that are directly located within and provide meaningful benefits to environmental justice populations. The Climate Crisis Infrastructure Fund will invest in initiatives that improve the health and welfare of the citizens of the State by creating a cleaner, more just, and more efficient transportation sector throughout the State; sequestering carbon in forests, soils, and wetlands; promoting a just transition to clean energy; as well as providing funding for resilience against climate change and weather events that have a devastating impact on the lives of the citizens of the State and its economy.



## Repeal of Marriage as a Defense to Sex Crimes - Love is No Defense

**Bill Number:** TBD

**One Sentence Synopsis:** This bill proposes to repeal the law allowing marriage as a defense to sex crimes.

**Committees:** Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

**Lead Sponsors:** Senator Susan Lee, Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield

**Lead Group:** Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault

**Lead Group Contact:** Lisae C Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel

**Describe the problem:**

This is a bill to repeal the current statute that makes marriage a defense to some sex crimes. Sexual Assault disproportionately affects women.

Like many states, Maryland's laws were based on the premise that marriage was consent to sex and that, therefore, a man could not rape his wife. Unlike many states, Maryland has not yet firmly rejected that antiquated and fundamentally disrespectful concept.

**Describe your proposed legislation:**

Criminal Law §3-318 provides that marriage is a defense to certain sex crimes. We have made some progress: Spouses can be prosecuted for any sex crime if they have a limited divorce or for some sex crimes if they have been separated for three months or have a written separation agreement. Finally, if the rape involved actual force or threat of force, marriage is not a defense. For other sex crimes, marriage is a complete defense. This bill repeals Criminal Law §3-318. Marriage should never be a defense to a sex crime.

**Benefit to Communities of Color:**

Black and Indigenous women who are victims of sex crimes receive less police protection, less interventions, fewer prosecutions of their assaulter, and less assistance. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that for every white woman that reports her rape, at least five white women do not report theirs; and yet, for every African-American woman that reports her rape, at least fifteen African-American women do not report theirs. (Reporting Crime to the Police, 1992-2000, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, March 2003). African American females experience intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white females, and about 2.5 times the rate of women of other races, (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). 48% of Latinas in one study reported that their partner's violence against them had increased since they immigrated to the US. (Dutton, Mary; Leslye Orloff, and

Giselle Aguilar Hass. 2000, Characteristics of help-seeking behaviors, resources, and services needs of battered immigrant Latinas: Legal and Policy implications. Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy, 7(2) ). This bill will help reform a criminal justice system that fails women of color.



## The Maryland State Police Gun Center - Protective Orders

**Bill Number:** TBD

**One Sentence Synopsis:** This bill will expand the role of the Maryland State Police Gun Center to include collecting and tracking data on guns surrendered pursuant to a final protective order.

**Committees:** Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

**Lead Sponsors:** Senator Pam Beidle

**Lead Group:** House of Ruth Maryland

**Lead Group Contact:** Dorothy Lennig, Legal Clinic Director

**Describe the problem:**

One of the most important safety tools victims of domestic violence use is the protective order. Every final protective order requires the respondent to surrender their firearms to law enforcement. Domestic violence advocates have long been concerned that respondents are not surrendering all of their firearms. There have been several high profile cases where respondents have either not surrendered their firearms or only surrendered some of their firearms and subsequently shot and killed their victims. Currently, different law enforcement agencies have different protocols for tracking the surrender of firearms. Last year, the Maryland General Assembly passed SB 861 which created the Maryland State Police Gun Center. The Center is “a statewide firearms enforcement center for the tracking, screening, and vetting of all firearm crimes committed in the state.” This bill would expand the role of the Center to require each law enforcement agency to report to the Center information about firearms surrendered pursuant to a final protective order. It would be the first step in analyzing whether our current system of protective order gun surrendering is effective.

**Describe your proposed legislation:**

If enacted, this bill will give us data about whether Maryland is effectively getting firearms out of the hands of respondents in final protective orders.

**Benefit to Communities of Color:**

Many people of color are reluctant to call the police, even in domestic violence cases, because of their past experiences with law enforcement. For some people of color who are domestic violence survivors, the civil protective order is a good alternative because it is a civil, not criminal, remedy. This means the survivor can apply for a protective order without involving law enforcement. Passage of this bill would make the civil protective order an even stronger remedy.



## Child Care Sustainability Act

**Bill Number:** TBD

**One Sentence Synopsis:** Sustain investments in the Child Care Scholarship Program ensuring access to affordable child care for Maryland families.

**Committees:** Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs, Senate Budget and Taxation, House Appropriations, House Ways and Means

**Lead Sponsors:** Senator Nancy King, Delegate Jared Solomon

**Lead Group:** Maryland Family Network

**Lead Group Contact:** Beth Morrow, Associate Director of Public Policy

### **Describe the problem:**

During their working lives, nearly 85% of women will become mothers. Because new babies generally increase families' expenses, family economic security suffers when families struggle to find and afford quality child care. Without care, women often struggle to re-enter the job market.

While Maryland has recently instituted dramatic improvements in its Child Care Scholarship Program, much work remains. Some changes will begin to minimize the burden women face when accessing support. Advocates anticipate policy changes such as presumptive eligibility for child care scholarship (CCS) applicants and a streamlining of the scholarship application itself will begin to eliminate barriers to access.

Without sustained funding, however, families could face increased costs or waiting lists for care.

### **Describe your proposed legislation:**

The Child Care Sustainability Act will be introduced in response to the growing (and overdue) recognition of two facts laid bare by the pandemic: Child care, in U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's words, is "a textbook example of a broken market." Child care is, moreover, an essential public good that not only needs but deserves substantial public investment.

The Child Care Scholarship Program (CCSP) is the largest public investment in the child care sector. In 2022, due to an influx of federal pandemic relief funds combined with an unexpectedly robust state economic rebound, Maryland's early childhood programs—CCSP among them, benefited from tremendous investments authorized by the Governor and the General Assembly.

On May 23, 2022, MSDE enacted three programmatic changes in the CCSP: 1. Income eligibility was increased from 65% of state median income to 75% of state median income; 2. Scholarship

reimbursement rates increased from the 60th percentile to the 70th percentile; and 3. parent co-pays were eliminated or significantly reduced.

According to estimates by The Regional Economic Studies Institute (RESI) at Towson University, for these programmatic changes to continue after the one-time federal funding sources are fully expended, the State will need to allocate additional funds for the CCSP. The cost estimates for FY 24 and FY 25 for these programmatic changes are \$67.2 million each year if the changes are expected to continue. If the State does not make an additional investment in FY 24 going forward, certain programmatic choices would be considered including reduced income eligibility, reduced reimbursement rates, and/or reinstate parent copays.

The Child Care Sustainability Act seeks to sustain the critical investments in the Child Care Scholarship Program.

**Benefit to Communities of Color:**

An equitable early start is essential because early disparities decrease the likelihood that children and families receive the opportunities and services they need to reach their full potential. Equitable early life experiences are formative inputs to an adult's educational attainment, health status, and social contributions. When we start from the beginning, the benefits of equity are maximized—for individuals and for society as a whole. Ongoing efforts are needed to embed equity in the design of early childhood education policies, programs, and practices. Maryland's current system of early care and education is not equal to the task of reliably promoting learning, healthy development, and school readiness for all children.



## Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth

**Bill Number:** TBD

**One Sentence Synopsis:** This bill will provide a safe harbor for child victims of sex trafficking and prevent their further victimization by connecting them to rehabilitative and supportive services through the already established Regional Navigator program, while providing a pathway to prevent any criminal or delinquent charges brought against them that are directly related to their trafficking.

**Committees:** Senate Judicial Proceedings, House Judiciary

**Lead Sponsors:** Senator Susan Lee

**Lead Group:** Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force

**Lead Group Contact:** Amanda Rodriguez, co-chair, Legislative Subcommittee, MD HTTF; Melanie Shapiro, co-chair, Legislative Subcommittee, MD HTTF

**Describe the problem:**

The majority of sex trafficking victims are women and girls. Currently in Maryland, children can be charged in the adult criminal or juvenile justice system for acts that are directly linked to their victimization, including prostitution and other related offenses.

**Describe your proposed legislation:**

This bill would provide a safe harbor for child victims of sex trafficking and prevent prosecution for acts committed as a result of their trafficking including prostitution and other related offenses. Legislation was passed in 2019 establishing the Regional Navigator program that connects child survivors of trafficking to necessary services. This bill will benefit women and girls by preventing them from being criminalized for acts they committed as a result of their trafficking victimization, and will support their healing rather than their continued punishment.

**Benefit to Communities of Color:**

Yes. Children of color are over-represented as child victims of sex trafficking. Communities of color as a whole are over-criminalized leading to children of color being disproportionately represented within the adult criminal and juvenile legal systems. This bill would provide a pathway out of these systems and would instead divert trafficked youth into services that support their healing rather than compound the trauma they've already experienced.



## 2023 Agenda Process and Bill Selection

The criteria for initiatives to be presented at the conference are:

- Addresses an issue related to women's health, women's personal safety at home, in public, in school, and in the workplace; the ability to achieve and maintain economic independence; or freedom from discrimination in Maryland's economic, educational, judicial, political, and social system;
- Can be addressed through the legislation in the Maryland General Assembly;
- Has a reasonable chance to move successfully through the legislative process;
- Has an identifiable, sustainable lead group that can shepherd the bill.
  - The lead group must:
    - Be a Maryland-based group or a national group with a strong on-the-ground presence in Maryland;
    - Have issue-area expertise and/or a track record of supporting legislation/advocacy in areas related to this proposal;
    - Have an identified representative who will be in regular contact with the MLAW Board of Directors about the progress of the legislation; and
    - Regularly provide legislative updates and supportive materials for MLAW to share with our members so that they can take action.

In 2020, we added a requirement that all legislative proposals submitted for consideration for the annual MLAW Legislative Agenda must include information about racial impact and be reviewed by the Board of Directors using a racial equity lens.

Following the conference, the bills presented will be sent to MLAW members for a vote. All individual and organizational members in good standing will be eligible to vote for their top priorities using rank choice voting. The top 6-8 bills will be selected as the **2023 Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women**.

The 2023 Agenda will be announced the week of December 19<sup>th</sup> and will officially presented at our **Annual Legislative Briefing**. The Briefing will be hosted on Zoom again this year, date TBD.