



WOMAN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

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December 28, 2016

Honorable Michael Busch
Speaker of the House of Delegates
Maryland General Assembly

Dear Speaker Busch,

The Woman's Democratic Club of Montgomery County (WDC) thanks you for your leadership in the passage of progressive legislation that makes our State such a great place to live, work, and raise families.

In these times of uncertainty about the new Administration's legislative goals, we need to make certain that all Marylanders are equally protected and that they have equal access to the benefits that help them achieve stability, health and prosperity.

Our Board has identified the following top priority areas for the 2017 legislative session. We respectfully request your support of legislation that addresses these priorities:

- **Working Families**
- **Criminal Justice**
- **Health Care**
- **Children's and Youth**

Working Families

The *Maryland Healthy Working Families Act* (Earned Safe and Sick Leave) and the *Fair Scheduling Act* are part of the Women's Economic Security Agenda (WESA), and we support them again this year.

We support *increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour*, and indexing it for inflation. Tipped workers should be covered. No full-time worker in Maryland should be paid poverty-level wages. As you know, our County Council is currently considering a \$15 minimum wage bill.

We support proposed legislation that would promote equal pay for women by *requiring employers to disclose salary ranges to applicants and prohibiting employers from requesting applicants' past salary history*.

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We urge you to pass legislation to clarify and strengthen the ***Reasonable Accommodations for Disabilities Due to Pregnancy Act***.

We strongly support development of legislation to provide for ***affordable child care***. Maryland ranks 49th of all States in the cost of childcare. In fact, annual childcare costs exceed the average cost of University of Maryland college tuition.

We eagerly await the recommendations of the ***Family and Medical Leave Insurance*** Task Force Study, and support development of legislation to provide such insurance immediately after the Task Force issues its study. It is long past time for Maryland to join the rest of the developed world in providing this basic support for working families.

Criminal Justice

WDC supports the ***Rape Survivor Family Protection Act***, which would enable rape victims to seek termination of rapists' parental rights when a child is conceived as result of rape. Current law prohibits such termination.

We support the ***Rape and Physical Resistance Act***, to clarify and modernize Maryland's rape statute. Law enforcement officials in Montgomery County cited the deficiencies in Maryland's statute as one reason 24 percent of reported rapes in Montgomery County are classified as unfounded. Current law encourages prosecutors to focus on victim behavior and resistance to the attack.

We encourage you to establish an implementation mechanism to ***ensure that convicted criminal domestic violence offenders surrender their firearms***, as required by current law. Such a bill failed last year, and will be reintroduced.

We support changing and clarifying the ***Tort Claims Act*** to make it easier for women employed in state government to bring a claim of sexual assault in the workplace.

As we did last session, we encourage you to pass legislation ***prohibiting life sentences without the possibility of parole for juveniles*** who commit criminal offenses while they are under age 18. Such legislation would bring Maryland in line with 17 other states that have prohibited these death-in-prison sentences for children, including West Virginia, Delaware, Texas, South Dakota, and Nevada.

Health Care

Again this year, WDC supports laws to create a more ***comprehensive, robust, and effective evidence-based mental health system***. This would include laws to remedy the lack of adequate mental health providers, programs, and facilities. We also support budget initiatives to improve and expand services for people with mental health and substance use disorders. Inadequate mental health facilities, providers, and programs undermine the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, hospital emergency rooms, and programs for the homeless.

WDC ***opposes fracking***, and urges you to pass laws to ban it. Groundwater contamination is a well-known threat related to fracking. In addition, The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and other institutions have documented that every step of the drilling process has an environmental impact. Fracking increases the risk of

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premature births, high-risk pregnancies, and other health-related problems.

Children and Youth

WDC supports *free school meals for all low-income students*. This bill would provide more than 45,000 students currently eligible for reduced-price meals with school meals at no cost to their families, thus reducing food insecurity and its negative health outcomes.

WDC also supports *Breakfast After the Bell*, a bill that would provide free breakfast to all students after the first bell in schools with a high concentration of students living in poverty. (Typically, schools serve breakfast from the time students first start arriving until the first bell rings, signaling the start of morning announcements that occur before academics begin. Late-arriving students, particularly in urban areas where many students do not ride school buses, tend to miss out on breakfast. To increase participation in breakfast programs, this bill would enable students to eat breakfast during announcements, before the beginning of academics.)

WDC supports legislation that would *ban expulsions and out-of-school suspensions for public school children in pre-K through second grade*. Children with disabilities and children of color are overrepresented among young children who are expelled or suspended.

WDC urges you to *establish a uniform, timely dispute resolution process that addresses the needs of children with disabilities and their families to access appropriate child care*, while assisting child care providers in meeting legal requirements and getting the necessary support to include children with disabilities.

WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic Clubs in Montgomery County, with over 400 members (both men and women). Many of our Montgomery County legislators are sponsoring or co-sponsoring bills that address our priorities. WDC is committed to working with them to achieve passage of these important initiatives that will benefit so many. We ask that you include these bills in your legislative agenda for the 2017 legislative session.

Respectfully,



Linda B. Kolko
President