



Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women

Hot Topics and Legislation for the 2017 Legislative Session

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Rape and Physical Resistance

Lisae Jordan, Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault

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Delegate Angela Angel

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Delegate Karen Young

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Reasonable Accommodations for Pregnant Workers

Andrea Johnson, National Women's Law Center

Restoration of Former Name after Divorce

Delegate Angela Angel

Patient's Bill of Rights

Anna Palmisano, Marylanders for Patient Rights

Universal Voter Registration Act

Holly Joseph, Maryland NOW

Rape Survivor Family Protection Act

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Delegate Kathleen Dumais, 410-841-3052; Senator Brian Feldman, 410-841-3169 and Senator Susan Lee, 410-841-3124

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: House Judiciary and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Lead Group: Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Lead Group Contact: Lisae Jordan, 443-995-5544

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

Sexual assault continues to disproportionately impact women. Any estimate of the incidence of sexual assault is just that – an estimate – rape, child sexual abuse, and other sexual offenses continues to be one of the most underreported crimes in America. However, we do know that one out of every 8 adult women, or about 260,000 adult women in Maryland, has been the victim of forcible rape sometime in her lifetime.

The Rape Survivor Family Protection Act is important legislation sends the message that we support the women who make the difficult choice to have a child that was conceived through rape. 5% of rape victims of reproductive age (age 12-45) became pregnant as a result of rape, with the majority of pregnancies in adolescents. The Rape Survivor Family Protection Act would give rape victims a process to terminate parental rights of rapists when a child is conceived as result of rape. Victims would be required to meet a clear and convincing standard of evidence. This is the same standard used for other termination of parental rights cases – no higher, no lower. At least ten states have statutes permitting termination of parental rights of rapists based on clear and convincing evidence. Moreover, last summer the federal Rape Survivor Child Custody Act passed Congress, was signed by the President and became law. This gives states financial incentives to pass laws like the RSFPA. This legislation has the support of pro-life and pro-choice advocates, women’s groups, the Attorney General, the Governor’s Office of Crime Control, and many religious organizations. It’s past time to enact this bill.

Rape and Physical Resistance

This bill on Rape and Physical Resistance clarifies and modernize Maryland's rape statute. Currently, there are three theories to prove rape: age based (statutory rape), capacity (intoxication, physical helplessness, or cognitive disabilities), and force or threat of force.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Delegate Kathleen Dumais, 410-841-3052 and Senator Delores Kelley, 410-841-3606

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: House Judiciary and Senate Judicial Proceedings

Lead Group: Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Lead Group Contact: Lisae Jordan, 443-995-5544

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

This bill on Rape and Physical Resistance clarifies and modernize Maryland's rape statute. Currently, there are three theories to prove rape: age based (statutory rape), capacity (intoxication, physical helplessness, or cognitive disabilities), and force or threat of force. Historically, force and threat of force required "utmost resistance" on the part of the victim, generally women. Prosecutions focused on what a victim did, how hard she fought, and whether she had physical injuries. Physical resistance was excused only when a victim feared "imminent bodily injury serious enough to overcome or impair the will to resist".

While most states have modernized their sexual assault laws through statutory reform or case law, Maryland has refused, making only modest progress through case law. This issue was highlighted by recent reports regarding "unfounded" rape cases in BuzzFeed. Law enforcement officials in Baltimore County and Montgomery County cited the deficiencies in Maryland's statute as one of the reasons rapists are not criminally charged.

Domestic Violence and Protective Orders

This bill expands the definition of “abuse” as it applies to petitions

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Delegate Angela Angel, 410-841-3707

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: House Judiciary

Lead Group: TBD

Lead Group Contact: TBD

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

There are many forms of domestic violence that are currently going unrecognized in the state of Maryland and leave many of its residents vulnerable in the cases of harassment and destruction of property. Presently, those experiencing constant harassment and malicious destruction of property are unable to obtain a Protective Order due to the limited scope of the definition of abuse. Women generally experience the highest rates of partner violence compared to males. Without this bill women and children all throughout the state of Maryland will continue to go unprotected and vulnerable to the escalating violence of their abusers.

Specifically, this bill will expand the definition of abuse to include written and electronic harassment while also expanding malicious destruction of property to include the act of defacing property. This bill will also require the State Board of Education to encourage County Boards of Education to incorporate age-appropriate lessons on domestic violence so that students will have a better understanding of all forms of harassment that fall within the realm of domestic violence.

There may be some reporting requirements included as well (TBD).

Maryland Tort Claims Act - Claim Requirement (Sexual Assault in the Workplace)

The proposed legislation provides that victims of sexual assault, in state government employment, may not be denied access to justice, as they currently are under law.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Senator Roger Manno, 410-841-3151

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: TBD

Lead Group: Maryland National Organization for Women

Lead Group Contact: Linda Mahoney and Edith Miller, 301-648-5484

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

This bill will make it easier for women employed in state government to bring a claim of sexual assault in the workplace under the Maryland Tort Claims Act. It removes the requirement that victims make a valid claim if notice is given within one year of the incident.

The proposed legislation provides that victims of sexual assault, in state government employment, may not be denied access to justice. Current law in Maryland is internally contradictory regarding claims brought by State employees. This legislation would correct an internal tension in the existing statute between the two provisions that require a claimant to show good cause and the defendant to show actual prejudice. Not filing notice should never prevent a claim from proceeding forward. In a case of sexual assault in the workplace, a victim might be traumatized and not be able to come forward in a year. Current law bars a state employee from making a valid claim of sexual assault if notice is not filed within one year.

Dispute Resolution - Child Care Providers and Children with Disabilities

Addresses the needs of children with disabilities & their families to get & keep child care by requiring rules & regs to establish an uniform, timely dispute resolution process.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Delegate Eric Luedtke, 410-841-3110

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: TBD

Lead Group: Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, Disability Rights Maryland, Education Advocacy Coalition

Lead Group Contact: Rachel London, RLondon@md-council.org

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

With 80% of mothers working outside the home in Maryland, the lack of access to high quality, inclusive child care affects many families.

And the lack of high quality child care where children with disabilities can learn & play alongside their peers without disabilities continues to be a major concern for families with children with disabilities. Despite the requirement that children with disabilities be provided an equal opportunity to meaningfully participate in child care programs, families struggle to find & keep child care. According to a 2012 report by the MD DD Council, 72% of families had difficulty finding or keeping child care for their child with a disability - 64% lost income and 32% quit their job due to the lack of access to child care. Right now, families do not know where to turn when they feel that their child with a disability has been denied access to child care due to discrimination on the basis of disability - there is no specific state process to make a formal complaint.

A process that addresses the needs of children with disabilities and their families to access child care with appropriate services, supports and accommodations is needed. At the same time, a process to assist child care providers in meeting legal requirements and getting the appropriate supports needed to include children with disabilities in their program is also needed. This legislation does both by requiring the establishment of a state process for families to make a formal complaint when they feel their child is denied access to child care due to disability. This not only helps the families but helps the child care providers - the vast majority of whom are women.

Requires the adoption of rules & regulations that establish a uniform and timely dispute resolution process that addresses the needs of children and their families. The process must include an investigation of discrimination complaints based on a child's disability; written findings; and appropriate remedies. The process may include an ombudsman, mediation, and/or other informal processes in addition to the required investigation and written findings and remedies. The process is to be developed by a work group of child care providers, Disability Rights MD, the MD DD Council, MSDE, MFN, and others.

Early Childhood - Ban on Public School Suspension & Expulsion

This bill will ban out of school suspensions and expulsions for all children in public preK through second grade programs.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Delegate Brooke Lierman, 410-841-3319 and Delegate Will Smith, 410-841-3493

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: TBD

Lead Group: ACLU, DD Council, Disability Rights Maryland

Lead Group Contact: TBD

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

Too many young children are being suspended and expelled from school. This effects women who are mothers and young girls. The majority of children being suspended are children with disabilities and children of color. In 2014-2015, 74 PreK students, 484 Kindergartners, 762 first graders and 1,031 second graders were suspended or expelled from Maryland Public Schools. These children are being set up for a lifetime of failure at the earliest of ages. Black children represent 18 percent of preschool enrollment but make up 48 percent of preschool children receiving more than one out-of-school suspension (per Dept of Ed March 2014 report). Both women in their role as mothers and young girls of color or with disabilities are dealing with the effect of this uneven punishment. In addition, family stability is effected when mothers need to stay home from work due to repeated suspensions. This inability to work can lead to job losses.

The bill will ban out of school suspensions and expulsions for preK through second grade. This will end the de-facto discrimination that occurs when children with disabilities and children of color are suspended or expelled from the earliest of ages. Mothers are speaking out about the need to protect their children - especially their sons - from the damaging effects that early and adverse actions by schools or teachers have on their lifetime potential. In 2014, a mother wrote a column in the Washington Post that went viral and has spurred on even more debate and changes around the country.

The bill will be a ban on expulsion and out-of-school suspension for preK to second graders.

Free School Meals for All Low-Income Students

Improve access to school meals by reducing the barrier of cost for reduced-price school meal eligible students.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Senator Richard Madaleno, 410-841-3137 and Delegate Sheila Hixson, 410-841-3469

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: Senate Budget & Taxation and House Ways & Means

Lead Group: Maryland Hunger Solutions

Lead Group Contact: Tam Lynne Kelley, 410-538-0021

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

Food insecurity is the lack of reliable access to healthy food - a condition which affects 11% of all Marylanders. Women are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity and its negative health outcomes. In fact, 30% of all U.S. households headed by a single woman are food insecure. People in food insecure households are two times as likely to have diabetes and four times more likely to have osteoporosis, for example. As a result, food insecurity is a root cause of health disparities. This bill will reduce both food insecurity and poverty - two conditions which disproportionate impact women and single mothers.

This bill will allow students in households between 130-185% poverty to receive free school meals. Women, particularly women of color, are more likely to be living in poverty and are more likely to be food insecure. This bill will support low-income families that are struggling to make ends meet. For example, a single mother with one child that earns between \$20,826 and \$29,637 a year qualifies for reduced-priced meals. However, most of the families in this group are still struggling to make ends meet, especially in Maryland with the high cost of living. Reduced-price eligible students often go without the food they need and/or incur cafeteria debts that frequently go unpaid. In fact, reduced-price eligible students are 26% less likely to eat school meals, compared to students that qualify for free school meals.

Approximately \$3 million in state funding will provide more than 45,000 reduced-price eligible students across the state with access to school meals at no cost to the student or family.

While many anti-hunger interventions target high-poverty schools, this bill directly targets the children and families who are most in need, regardless of which school they attend. This bill builds on the success of school-based interventions, such as the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP is currently being used in 229 Maryland schools to provide access to free school breakfast and lunch.

Protecting Renting Families Act

This bill seeks to protect renting families from unfair evictions by reforming the judicial eviction process and increasing landlords' compliance with public safety laws.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): TBD

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: House Environment & Transportation and Senate Judicial Proceedings

Lead Group: Public Justice Center, 7000 Families Campaign

Lead Group Contact: Zafar Shah, shahz@publicjustice.org

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

Rent disputes account for over 600,000 lawsuits across Maryland each year PJC found in a recent study (see <http://justicediverted.org>) that 78% of "Rent Court" defendants in Baltimore City are women. Most of them are African Americans, have children, struggle on a monthly income below \$2,000, and do not have public assistance for housing. In Baltimore City alone, this situation results in 70+ thousand warrants for eviction and around 7,000 actual evictions each year. Many of these women cannot financially avoid eviction, but many others face loss of housing because of an imbalanced court system. That is partly due to renters' lack of knowledge and access to legal representation, but it also stems from the absence of accountability measures in judicial process. Under current housing law, landlords typically use "Rent Court" to sue for anything broadly defined in the lease as "added rent": utility bills, penalty fees, repair costs, housing citations, and so on. They can sue for these amounts without providing details in their legal complaints or evidence to the court. At the same time almost 80% of landlords studied by PJC should not have been able to sue because they had violated lead risk requirements; over 60% of them won an eviction order anyway. Lacking accountability measures, "Rent Court" has become the easiest, quickest way to collect on suspicious debts, and many women, most especially Black women, are paying the price.

Our proposed solution is to limit the range of alleged debts that landlords can sue for in an eviction case and to strengthen the court's 'police' power over lawbreaking landlords. Basically, we need to remove, through new statutory language, any doubt that "non-payment of rent" eviction cases are narrowly limited to disputes about the monthly rent and nothing else. A narrow definition of "rent" in the law will not only help renters better understand the claims against them and how to defend themselves, but also remove complicated evidentiary contests from the court's enormous case load. Gone would be scenarios in which a family loses its home because of an unpaid water bill or pays the landlord's maintenance costs under threat of eviction. Secondly, we need to give judges the tools to penalize landlords who use the "Rent Court" but avoid lead risk reduction compliance. Currently, when landlords lie about compliance, judges have no specific statutory grounds to review Department of Environment records, make a finding as to compliance, and enforce the law. A bill that adds such grounds will boost lead law compliance in the rental market and help ensure that women and children are not moving into unsafe rental homes.

Our proposed legislation will (1) add a definition of "rent" to the Real Property article and narrowly define "rent," for purposes of judicial eviction in residential cases, as "the fixed, periodic sum paid by the tenant for use and possession of the premises." It will (2) remove language presently in Sec. 8-401(c)(2) of the Real Property article that prevents the court from reviewing landlords' lead risk reduction status in an eviction proceeding and add language that requires the court to undertake such review and to dismiss cases with prejudice when a landlord fails to show documentary evidence of compliance.

"Women on Board" Bill-Corporate Board Gender Diversity Requirements

Gender diversity on Corporate boards

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Delegate Karen Young, 410-841-3436

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: House Health and Government Operations

Lead Group: National Women's Law Center

Lead Group Contact: Andrea Johnson, 202-319-3041

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

The intent of this bill is to encourage equitable and diverse gender representation on corporate boards.

Encourage companies to abide by board appointment practices, which aim to maintain a diverse composition. Plan to obtain bill language from CA, MA, Illinois, and obtain input/support from SiX, AAUW, and NWLC.

Encourage companies to abide by board appointment practices, which aim to maintain a diverse composition. Instead of attempting to compel all companies to maintain mandatory quotas, the scope of this bill extends only to those companies seeking work-contracts with the state. Presumably, the size of a company and the value of the proposed work contract would be taken into consideration when determining the quotas to which any particular company is subject and whether or not they would be subject to this statute at all. Leading authorities on pay equity believe the next important step involves placing more women on corporate boards can influence compensation policies and practices.

Equal Pay Salary History and Salary Range

Prohibits asking past salary history & disclose salary range for the position.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Delegate Karen Young, 410-841-3436

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: House Economic Matter

Lead Group: National Women's Law Center

Lead Group Contact: Andrea Johnson, 202-319-3041

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

The intent of this bill is to introduce legislation that prohibits discriminatory practices and increases transparency from employers when hiring women.

Introduce legislation that prohibits discriminatory practices and increases transparency for women in the work force. Plan to obtain and review past legislation from MA and CA and review with the NWLC and AAUW, and gain support from other organizations.

Employers may not ask past salary history and Employers over a certain size (TBD) must disclose a salary range for the position when requested by applicant.

Maryland Healthy Working Families Act

This legislation would enable workers to earn a limited number of annual paid sick and safe days from their employer.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Senator Catherine Pugh, 410-841-3656 and Delegate Luke Clippinger, 410-841-3303

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: Senate Finance and House Economic Matters

Lead Group: Job Opportunities Task Force

Lead Group Contact: Melissa Broome, 410-234-8046

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

Everyone gets sick and everyone deserves time to recover without risking their economic stability, yet 41% of American workers are unable to earn paid sick days. Here in Maryland, more than 700,000 of our neighbors are forced to make impossible choices: go to work sick, send an ill child to school or daycare, or stay home and sacrifice much-needed income or, worse, risk job loss. Among low-wage workers, the people who can least afford to take unpaid time off from work when sick, 80% lack access to paid sick days.

This issue has an especially severe impact on women. Working women are more likely to have significant caregiving responsibilities – including caring for elderly parents, children or ill spouses/partners – yet women-dominated industries are among the least likely to offer paid sick days. Without this basic workplace benefit, women are often left with no choice but to forego pay in order to meet their families' health care needs.

Our laws need to be updated to reflect the reality of today's families. Nearly two-thirds of mothers work outside the home, and women's earnings make up a substantial share of family income. Half of working mothers miss work when their child gets sick. Of these mothers, half do not get paid when they take this time off. Among low-income working mothers, two in three report losing pay. Working women need a basic workplace standard of paid sick days so they don't have to choose between keeping their job and caring for a sick child or family member.

The proposed legislation, which was introduced for the first time in 2013, requires Maryland employers to allow workers to earn a certain number of annual paid sick and safe days. Employees would begin accruing hours from the start of employment but would not be allowed to use their paid sick time until the completion of a probationary period. The "safe time" component of the legislation requires employers to allow employees who have been victims of domestic abuse or sexual assault to use their accrued paid sick leave to care for their health after these incidents or to seek legal protections or new housing.

Fair Scheduling Act

This bill will provide hourly workers some measure of predictability in their schedules so they can plan for and balance their non-work responsibilities by incentivizing employers to build stable, predictable, family-friendly schedules and fairly compensate employees for the time they make available to their employers.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Senator Joanne Benson, 410-841-3148 and Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher, 410-841-3130

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: Senate Finance and House Economic Matters

Lead Group: Maryland Working Families

Lead Group Contact: Dante Bishop, 240-291-7052

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

One of the biggest obstacles for women being able to create economic and family stability is having a predictable schedule. Employers increasingly schedule workers on-call with no guarantee of work or pay, cancel shifts at the last minute, or send workers home early without compensation. Whether she's an hourly worker or a highly-skilled professional, scheduling predictability can reduce both financial and emotional stress on women who must juggle work and family. This demand for constant availability has a particularly high impact on the more than 410,000 hourly workers in Maryland who have kids at home, and the 77,000 hourly workers balancing more than one job. Today half of Maryland's workforce is paid by the hour—that's over 1.3 million residents of the state with no protection against abusive scheduling. When workers cannot predict their work hours or their pay and have no voice in their schedules, they can't arrange child care, secure a second job, or complete the training they need to advance their careers. Women and workers of color are particularly likely to work in hourly jobs with little control over their schedules.

Women make up 49 percent of Maryland's workforce, and more than 300,000 households in the state are led by women. This bill will provide hourly workers some measure of predictability in their schedules so they can plan for and balance their non-work responsibilities. This will provide crucial support to the women of our state, as nearly 70% of Maryland's low-wage workers – those making \$10.10 or less an hour – are in fact women. The Just Scheduling Act will reform Maryland law to ensure that employees get paid for the time they give to their employers and prevents employers from destabilizing the lives of the lowest paid and most vulnerable workers and their families – more often than not, women. This critical legislation will incentivize employers to build stable, predictable, family-friendly schedules and fairly compensate employees for the time that make available to their employers.

The Fair Scheduling initiative will guarantee predictable schedules so workers can plan ahead to meet their responsibilities on and off the job. It also allows employees to be compensated for their time and flexibility and encourages employers to create stable schedules. The Fair Scheduling Act will require: employers provide at least 3 weeks advance written notice of schedules and that employees are only required to work the hours on their schedule; employees have the right to decline any hours scheduled without advance notice. {If employers want to make a change to an employee's schedule, the employee must consent and the employer must provide written notice within 24 hours.}; employees are paid for the hours they're scheduled or 4 hours (whichever is fewer) when shifts are cancelled or shortened within 24 hours, including an unworked on-call shift; if an employer changes an employee's hours with less than 3 weeks' notice, the employer must pay the employee 1 hour of predictability pay – at the employee's regular rate of pay – for each schedule change.

Reasonable Accommodations for Pregnant Workers

This bill will clarify and strengthen Maryland's pregnancy accommodation law.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Delegate Marice Morales, 410-841-3528

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: Senate Judicial Proceedings and House Economic Matters

Lead Group: National Women's Law Center

Lead Group Contact: Andrea Johnson, 202-319-3041

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

While many women will work through their pregnancies without any need for accommodations, some women will need temporary adjustments to their job duties to continue working safely during pregnancy. When pregnant workers have asked for these temporary adjustments, however, too often employers have denied their requests. Instead of receiving simple accommodations that would allow them to continue working safely, many pregnant workers have been forced onto unpaid leave or out of a job entirely. Losing a job or being forced onto leave can be calamitous for these workers and their growing families. In families with children, 41 percent of mothers are primary breadwinners. Women in low-wage jobs are particularly likely to seek and be denied pregnancy accommodations, given the physically demanding nature of many low-wage jobs and a culture of inflexibility in many low-wage workplaces. These women in low-wage occupations are also even more likely to be their family's primary breadwinners and income loss during pregnancy can impose particularly severe consequences on these families. No woman should have to choose between her job and a healthy pregnancy.

In 2013, Maryland enacted into law the Reasonable Accommodations for Disabilities Due to Pregnancy Act, which has helped many pregnant workers in Maryland get reasonable accommodations that allow them to continue working during their pregnancies. However, more women would be able to work safely and support their families during their pregnancies if important clarifications were made about the scope of the law's protections and employers' obligations to provide reasonable accommodations. Likewise, more women in Maryland would benefit if the current law were strengthened in several key ways. The current law permits an employer to provide a pregnant worker with leave as a reasonable accommodation even though many women cannot afford or do not want to take leave and could continue working if they were provided another reasonable accommodation. The current law also does not require reasonable accommodations for lactation-related needs even though such accommodations would help so many working mothers get back to work and care for their families. The proposed bill will provide these much needed clarifications to Maryland's pregnancy accommodations law and strengthen the law to ensure women aren't forced out on leave and are accommodated while lactating.

This bill will: make clarifications to Maryland's pregnancy accommodation law to ensure that pregnant workers with a medical need for workplace accommodations due to normal pregnancy are in fact provided reasonable accommodations; strengthen Maryland's existing law to require employers to provide reasonable accommodations for lactation; and strengthen Maryland's existing law to prohibit employers from forcing pregnant workers out on leave when they could be reasonably accommodated.

Restoration of Former Name after Divorce

The court shall change the name of the requesting party to either the name given the party at birth or any other former name the party wishes to use under specified circumstances.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Delegate Angela Angel, 410-841-3707

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: House Judiciary

Lead Group: TBD

Lead Group Contact: TBD

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

This bill addresses one financially burdensome issue many women face after divorcing: the process of restoring their former names. While the process to change ones name after marriage is relatively simple and inexpensive, changing ones name after a divorce is not so. Women are disproportionately affected by this bill because women largely comprise the majority of individuals seeking to restore their former names after a divorce.

This bill establishes that the provisions for actions related to a change of name do not apply to a change of name for a party that took a new name upon marriage and no longer wishes to use it. This simple bill can save women the \$135 name change petition filing fee that is associated with applying for a change of name. Some women may experience financial distress after divorcing and this bill can help alleviate some of the monetary strain.

This bill allows an individual seeking to restore their former name to do so without wading through the costly process of filing a name change petition.

Patient's Bill of Rights

The Patient's Bill of Rights will update a 1978 law to increase transparency and ensure humane and ethical treatment of hospital patients.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Senator Joanne Benson, 410-841-3148 and Delegate Karen Lewis Young, 410-841-3436

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: House Health and Government Operations and Senate Finance

Lead Group: Marylanders for Patient Rights

Lead Group Contact: Anna Palmisano, palmscience@verizon.net

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

Maryland hospitals rank among the lowest in 50 states in hospital patient satisfaction. The 1978 Maryland law on patient rights lacks transparency. As a result, patient rights are highly variable among hospitals and often not communicated to the patient or family caregiver. The proposed legislation will update this inadequate law, and provide better protection for patients and their families. As both primary caregivers for their families and as patients, women are disproportionately affected by the lack of a patient's bill of rights that is transparent and consistent among hospitals. Moreover, elderly women make up the fastest growing population of hospital patients, and they would greatly benefit from updating and improving the current law on patient's rights.

The updated Patient's Bill of Rights will contain a detailed, transparent, and consistent list of rights for patients. The bill will require that each hospital provide a written copy of the Patient's Bill of Rights to the patient (or family caregiver) at the time of registration. The bill will promote the health, safety, and well-being of all hospital patients and ensure that patients are treated with dignity and respect. Women and men who are patients or caregivers for family members will be ensured the right to be part of the decision-making for their own health and that of their families. Thus, the Patient's Bill of Rights will help to empower women to be more involved with health care decisions.

The updated Patient's Bill of Rights will promote the ethical and humane treatment of hospital patients. Hospitals will be required to provide written information about patient's rights to each patient or family member in a language that the patient understands. The legislation will require that patients receive treatment without discrimination in a clean and safe environment. The Patient's Bill of Rights will ensure that patients are engaged in key decisions, and that they have a full understanding of treatment costs and alternatives. It will reduce risks to patients by improving communication with hospital personnel. Annual training will be required of medical staff at hospitals to promote the communication of patient rights.

Universal Voter Registration Act

This bill automatically registers all eligible voters who are at least 16 years old, U.S. citizens, and Maryland residents.

Lead Legislative Sponsor(s): Senator Roger Manno, 410-841-3151

Committee(s) bill is assigned to: Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs

Lead Group: Maryland National Organization for Women

Lead Group Contact: Linda Mahoney and Edith Miller, 301-648-5484

Describe the problem and how it relates to women. Provide a summary of your legislation and how it will address the problem.

Increasing access to the ballot box and voting has always been a women's issue, from the women's suffrage movement to the current presidential election, whose outcome women will determine. Although Maryland ranks as one of the best states for women, our state lags in political participation (C- grade), according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Automatic voter registration (AVR) is the first, crucial step to increasing political participation among women because it makes it easier for women of all socio-economic backgrounds to be registered to vote. Whether a woman is a working mother who doesn't have time to figure out the registration process or a senior citizen with limited mobility, automatic voter registration helps more women exercise their right to vote.

According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, an average of 63.3% of women in Maryland were registered to vote in 2012, compared to an average of 60.2% of men. As proposed in our bill, AVR relies on more statewide agencies than the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to automatically register eligible voters. This means that women who interact with social service agencies to receive food stamps or unemployment insurance, or sign up for health insurance through the Maryland Health Benefits Exchange, will be automatically registered to vote. This ensures that a greater number of women will be registered to vote - not only women who have the economic means to own and operate a vehicle and register through traditional means at the MVA.

Our bill automatically registers eligible voters who are at least 16 years old, U.S. citizens and Maryland residents through data sharing between the MVA, social service agencies, Health Benefit Exchange and State Board of Elections. Most importantly, this bill also ensures privacy protections for victims of domestic violence and a "safe harbor" provision for those who are inadvertently registered. Voting is a fundamental right that women have always fought for. This legislation has the potential to register nearly 400,000 more Marylanders, including women of all backgrounds. Ensuring that all women in Maryland who are eligible are registered to vote strengthens our democracy and civic participation. It removes current barriers that women face in registering to vote, such as voter registration deadlines and uncertainty about where to register. In this way, AVR continues in our country's shared legacy of making it easier for everyone to vote, as we have done for centuries.