



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

Keeping Members
More Informed,
More Connected, and
More Politically Effective

Striving for
Racial, Social,
and Economic
Equity for
Women and
their families.

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WomensDemocraticClub.org

Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club 2023 Advocacy Priorities

The Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC) is one of the largest and most active Democratic clubs in the County with hundreds of politically active women and men, including many elected officials. WDC members work together to elect Democrats, keep voters informed, advocate for state and local issues of importance to women and their families, and educate our community on critical issues.

During the 444th legislative session we saw an effort by the General Assembly to resume the normal course of business with in-person hearings. The move to virtual communications throughout 2020 and 2021 demonstrated not only how flexible our legislative body and constituents can be when faced with life threatening challenges, but also unexpectedly revealed how a virtual or hybrid environment opens the legislative process to more Marylanders who were previously locked out due to a variety of limitations. WDC urges both the Senate and House to consider this new paradigm as we move forward.

In 2023, WDC will continue to focus our advocacy on those legislative priorities disproportionately impacting women and their families. Top-level issue areas for the 2023 legislative session are Affordable Housing, Aging, Criminal Justice Reform, Children and Youth, Health, Immigration, and our newest subcommittee created in response to national events - *Reproductive Health & Justice*. However, we will continue to monitor reintroduction of bills we supported last session that did not pass or were vetoed, as well as continued oversight of significant enacted bills to ensure they are being implemented.

We will continue our support for a countywide approach to evaluate local and state legislation through a racial, social, environment, and economic equity lens. The theme of equity and justice is not only woven into our advocacy, but it also extends into everything we do.

The burden on women and their families in Montgomery County resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has not subsided. Many areas still need to be addressed. Therefore, WDC will continue to prioritize legislation that provides programs and funding to alleviate the current impact and long-term side effects of the pandemic, particularly on families.

Please feel free to direct any questions or requests to Diana Conway or JoAnne Koravos. We look forward to an active and productive legislative year working alongside our Montgomery County State Delegation!

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WDC 2023 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Affordable Housing
Aging
Children and Youth
Criminal Justice Reform
Health
Immigration
Reproductive Health and Justice

AFFORDABLE HOUSING –Janet Frank, Chair

Core Issues: WDC supports the preservation and expansion of affordable housing for low- and moderate- income families in Montgomery County. According to the Montgomery County Commission for Women's Mothers and Poverty Committee, a disproportionate number of single mothers are living in poverty, and the Immigrant Women in Montgomery County (IWin) Committee found that immigrant women face serious challenges in accessing a variety of services for their families.

WDC urges the county and state legislature to enact and fund legislation to support the supply of and access to affordable housing, and to prevent families from losing their homes through rent increases and unjust evictions. Montgomery County has a significant shortage of affordable housing available for low- and moderate-income households. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments estimates that Montgomery County needs to add 41,000 housing units in the next ten years to meet housing demand and at least 75 percent of this housing will need to be affordable to low- and middle-income households. A report commissioned by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development shows:

- A shortage of 85,000 affordable apartments in Maryland for families and individuals earning less than 30% of median income.
- An additional 97,200 families and individuals earning less than 50% of median income are expected to move to the state by 2030, highlighting the need to dramatically increase affordable housing supply over the next 10 years.
- Individuals and families of color face additional hurdles when looking for housing, and these disparities have been made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic.



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Research shows that increasing access to affordable housing is the most cost-effective strategy for reducing childhood poverty and increasing economic mobility. Stable rents are key to helping families stay in their homes. In Montgomery County 40 percent of residents are renters. Preventing rents from skyrocketing and renters from being evicted are priorities for WDC. It is critical that we ensure that Montgomery County families are safeguarded from destabilizing and unjust displacement.

WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities:

- WDC supports efforts to address the housing needs and obstacles facing Montgomery County renters and homeowners. The county needs to incorporate affordable housing options into long-term county residential planning.
- WDC supports sustained investment in a range of housing options, including programs that foster racially and ethnically diverse communities and economic diversity.
- WDC supports initiatives for rent stabilization in this period of unprecedented increases in rents.
- WDC supports the prohibition of evictions without just cause from leased premises. It is critical we ensure that Montgomery County families are safeguarded from destabilizing and unjust displacement. Evictions can lead to homelessness, job loss, income insecurity, food insecurity, and increased student transiency, among other serious impacts that reverberate throughout the community.
- WDC urges the passage of SB0384 – *Landlord and Tenant – Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance Determination* which passed last session only to be vetoed by the governor.

AGING –Liza Smith, Chair

Core Issues: According to the Maryland Department of Aging, the percent of older citizens is increasing and individuals between the ages of 80-84 are the fastest growing segment of the population. In fact, through the year 2040, 63.8% of the state's older adults will reside in Baltimore City, and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties; and the 60+ populations in Maryland will be comprised of 55.7% women vs. 44.3% men. In the U.S., 12.1% of women 65 and older live in poverty, compared to 7.4% of their male peers. Therefore, the economic, physical, and environmental challenges that plague our aging population have a greater impact on Montgomery County's older female residents and their families. Older women (60+) are often burdened with lower incomes, caregiving situations for elderly parents or other vulnerable family members including grandchildren, limited community resources, and high medical and prescription drug costs. Working seniors (55+) also experience a high percentage of discriminatory practices. In fact, Maryland was listed in the top 10 of the states



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registering the highest employment-to-population ratios for workers aged 55 and older with 43% of its 55+ population still working (pre-pandemic). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted women putting an increased burden on older women. Furthermore, older adults, particularly older women, are often victims of fraud and abuse. Issues impacting aging women also put a burden on their families who often depend on them for family care or additional income.

WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities: WDC urges the state legislature to enact legislation that will support Maryland and Montgomery County's aging female population and their families. WDC supports legislation that will ensure economic security for aging women, both working and retired status; contribute to healthy aging; and support affordable, compassionate elder care, including:

- Stabilizing long-term care insurance premiums
- Preserve and expand affordable rental housing for seniors
- Expanding protections and resources for caregivers of seniors, and seniors who provide caregiving for other family members
- Increased oversight of nursing homes and assisted living facilities to ensure these facilities are compliant with all legal requirements
- Fair and nondiscriminatory employment practices for aging employees
- Prevention and mitigation of fraud and abuse perpetrated on the senior population
- Supporting the creating, regulation, and funding of aging-in-place programs
- Increased programming for older women to participate in community service, particularly multi-generational engagement

WDC also urges the reconsideration of HB0161– *Criminal Law - Exploitation of Vulnerable Adult or Elderly Individual - Undue Influence* will redefine and clarify the term “undue influence” as it pertains to exploitation of vulnerable and elderly individuals.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH – JoAnne Koravos, Acting Chair

Core Issues: Although a cliché, it is true that children are our future. Therefore, we need to give them the best foundation we can – at home, at school, and in the community. We ask you to support legislation that will accelerate implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future comprehensive 10-year education plan; fully fund public schools and educational services;



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ensure that childcare facilities are compliant and safe; protect children against violence and abuse; and promote safe and healthy living environments, including addressing food insecurity.

WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities:

- ***Blueprint for Maryland's Future.*** Accelerate implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future comprehensive 10-year education plan and hold those responsible for implementation accountable. House Bill 1450, passed last session, directs certain revenues to the Blueprint for Maryland Future Fund (BMFF) and other accountability and implementation guidelines at the state and county level. In general, WDC supports all the top-level recommendations of the original Kirwan Commission:
 - Ensure full funding for our public schools (especially schools with a high concentration of children living in poverty)
 - Provide early childhood education for all 4-year-olds, low-income 3-year-olds, and all children with disabilities.
 - Elevate the status of the teaching profession
 - Establish world class college and career-readiness pathways
 - Provide more resources for At-Risk-Students
- ***Other educational related issues.*** In the current national environment, several education-related concerns troubling parents and communities have risen to the top, such as: school safety; specific protections for LGBTQ youth in schools, homeless shelters, and other public facilities; and preserving an open educational experience and access to educational materials (no book bans!). WDC supported HB47 (SB462) to expand American History education to include African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Hispanic Americans, and other groups.
- ***Childcare.*** Childcare should not only be available and safe, but also affordable without compromising quality. WDC supported several bills introduced during the 2022 legislative session designed to incentivize qualified childcare facilities and employees (HB0089/SB0480; HB1100; HB0993) and provide financial support for families of eligible children (HB0995/SB0920). We urge you to consider further legislation to address the availability of quality childcare to all families regardless of their economic or citizenship status.
- ***Protect children against violence and abuse.*** We should adopt a zero-tolerance policy for any violence or abuse against children. This includes exploitation by online social media sites and apps. Family support services and education helps identify safe solutions while the child is still in the family setting. However, we need to also teach children about their rights. Training judges on cases involving child abuse or domestic violence is one step (SB0017). Altering the definition of "neglect" in statutory provisions that govern a child in need of assistance (CINA) proceedings should be re-evaluated during the 2023 session to help clarify statutory language that guides



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legal action (HB0338). The MGA should also reconsider the 2022 bill titled “Maryland Child Protection Act of 2022” (HB1214).

- **Promote safe and healthy living environments.** WDC has consistently supported safe playing fields and opposed the use and toxic disposal of synthetic turf. In 2023, we will again support legislation addressing chain of custody such as HB0131/SB0321 - “Environment - Synthetic Turf and Turf Infill - Chain of Custody”. Other areas of support will include, but not limited to, legislation that addresses the existence of food deserts in the county.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM – Carol Cichowski, Chair

Core Issues: The Criminal Justice Reform subcommittee acknowledges important steps taken by Maryland’s General Assembly in the past few years to begin to address serious issues in law enforcement and criminal justice—systems plagued by unjust racial disparities and abuses of human rights. For example, we applaud the enactment of the Juvenile Restoration Act in 2021 and the Juvenile Justice Reform Act in 2022. However, there is much work left to be done. For example, no action was taken on a critically important reform supported by the Juvenile Justice Reform Council—the elimination of the automatic charging of youth as adults. Maryland’s out-of-date tough-on-crime policy gives it the distinction of charging more children as adults than any state other than Alabama. This is one of the areas in which Maryland is out of step with actions taken in other states to fix problematic laws, address structural racism, and promote humane and effective policies and practices.

WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities: Criminal justice reform is vital to protecting everyone in our state and creating the kind of environment in which women, children, and their families can thrive. Therefore, we urge the passage of legislation aimed at addressing inequities at all points of contact with the criminal justice system, eliminating the abuse of human rights, and promoting respectful treatment of people that recognizes their potential as human beings. We urge the state legislature to attend to its unfinished business in criminal justice reform and pass legislation that--

- Ends the automatic charging of youth as adults, without exceptions, and treats all young people as deserving of rehabilitation and access to services designed to help them to become productive adults (HB0294/SB0165.)
- Ends the prosecution of and provides a safe harbor and appropriate services for child victims of sex trafficking (HB0833, as amended).



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- Recognizes the importance of keeping families intact and strengthening bonds between mothers and children by using community-based programs as an alternative to incarceration for primary caretakers convicted of non-violent crimes (HB0337/SB0021) and preventing forced separation of infants from incarcerated mothers (HB0454/SB0776).
- Repeals the spousal defense to all sex crimes involving married people, including non-consensual touching (HB0153/SB0033).
- Removes obstacles to employment by building on recently passed expungement legislation to add other non-conviction charges (HB0122/SB0138) and to reduce the waiting periods for expungement of records for non-violent crimes (HB1442/SB0710).
- Decriminalizes student misconduct that should be treated as a violation of the student code of conduct and not a crime (HB0084/SB0119).
- Establishes further restrictions on the use of restrictive housing in prisons—solitary confinement—that builds on legislation passed in 2019 (HB1001/SB0774) and 2022 (HB0067).
- Eliminates the application of the felony murder doctrine, a fiction that allows prosecutors to seek the harshest penalties without having to prove any intent to kill and is at odds with the principle of proportionality in our system of justice.
- Restricts access to firearms by children by strengthening firearm storage requirements (HB0659/SB0676).
- Addresses possible inequities relating to the war on cannabis and its legalization that were not sufficiently addressed by the passage of HB0837.
- Fully funds the planning, construction, and operations of the women's prerelease center.

HEALTH – Margaret Hadley, Chair

Core Issues: A core value of WDC is that all Marylanders should have access to cost effective, efficient, and affordable health care. This must include all segments of our population including women and children, people who work, people who are disabled, and people who are otherwise under-represented in the health care system. It also must include all aspects of health care including coverage for women's reproductive rights, prescription drugs, and mental health.



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WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities:

- Maryland has been successful in bringing down premiums and co-pays for individual coverage through the Maryland Healthcare Exchange by implementing an innovative State Reinsurance Plan that has added a record 180,000 individuals in 2022 alone, including an 11% increase in Black enrollees, a 14% increase in Hispanic enrollees and a 7% increase in Young Adult enrollees. The plan however is only funded through 2028. *WDC urges the state legislature to develop a permanent funding source for this important program.*
- Marylanders should also have access to culturally competent behavioral health care. Two-thirds of Maryland's counties qualify as federally designated mental health professional shortage areas and behavioral health providers receive nearly 20% less than other doctors for similar care. Maryland ranked 7th WORST in the nation last year for opioid death rates. *WDC urges support of the 2023 behavioral health crisis prevention platform* which would require the Maryland Department of Health to develop and advance a plan to expand the state's network of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, ensure Medicaid recipients have equitable access to effective primary care and ensure the workforce exists to accomplish service access goals.
- Finally, when the Federal Government ends the COVID Public Health Emergency, possibly as early as this January, HHS estimates up to 15 million people will be disenrolled from Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. *WDC urges the state legislature to act now to mitigate these effects in Maryland.*

IMMIGRATION - Fatmata Barrie, Chair

Core Issues: WDC is keenly aware of the important role immigrants continue to play in our communities. Foreign-born residents now make up more than one-third of the population in Montgomery County. Central to the successful integration of our immigrant community is access to resources and equitable social networks to help their families and children thrive.

According to the 2019 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) and Decennial Census, 15.9 % of Maryland Residents are Foreign Born compared to 13.7% of U.S. Residents. Almost one-third of Montgomery County residents are foreign born – an increase of 8.6% since 2010 (ACS, www.MCFacts.org). Adding the children of foreign-born parents pushes that percentage of Montgomery County residents living in immigrant families close to 45%.

From a public safety and criminal justice perspective - like their Black American counterparts, Black immigrants are more likely to be stopped by police. They are also disproportionately



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arrested. Therefore, they are more likely to have a criminal record and to be detained and deported by ICE. This is called the “prison to deportation pipeline.” However, unlike their non-immigrant counterparts who are accused of a crime, immigrants do not have the right to counsel and therefore are not afforded a fair process. Consequently, immigrants who end up in deportation proceedings are not able to defend themselves because they do not have money to hire an attorney. Deportation rips apart families and puts a disproportionate burden on immigrant women and children.

According to an Immigration Fact Sheet released by the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, Maryland remains a major destination for both authorized and unauthorized immigrants and over 45% of immigrants to Maryland reside in Montgomery County, the highest percentage in the state. In fact, over 50% of foreign-born residents in the county are women and approximately 30% of our school age children have one or both parents who are foreign born.

WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities: WDC understands there are other advocacy organizations that specifically address immigration and we are poised to support these efforts. However, due to current events the plight of immigrants and refugees to the United States has intensified concern for immigrant women and their families. Therefore, WDC will monitor legislation introduced in 2023 and identify bills that specifically address issues that disproportionately impact the economic security, education, healthcare, and public safety of immigrant women and their children.

Possible legislation for support may include:

- *Universal Representation (SB0317/HB0750):* Hundreds of immigrants in Maryland are detained in local jails through immigration detention agreements that ICE has with certain counties, and when facing deportation, they do not have a right to a lawyer. We must ensure that all Marylanders who are in detention and facing deportation have access to justice in the form of zealous legal counsel to represent them in removal proceedings.
- *The Maryland Trust Act (SB0088/HB0304):* The Trust Act is legislation that will increase the safety of Maryland families by improving community relationships with law enforcement and other state entities through limiting the state's partnership with national efforts to enforce federal immigration laws. The Trust Act would allow for vulnerable immigrants to be more willing to report crimes, use available health and social services for their families, and enroll their children in school.
- *The Access to Care Act (SB728):* There are more than 275,000 uninsured immigrants in Maryland. Majority of those are within families, especially mixed families. This access to healthcare would “ensure ALL income-eligible Marylanders can purchase coverage through the exchange, regardless of status.” CASA is leading the advocacy efforts on this bill.



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- *Healthy Babies Equity Act (SB778/HB1080)*: This bill will extend Medicaid services to undocumented pregnant women. This directly impacts families because, as we know, maternal health is critical for a healthy baby and a healthy family. CASA is also championing this bill.

WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND JUSTICE– Ginger Macomber, Chair

Core Issues: With the Supreme Court's decision to overturn the federal protections of Roe vs. Wade and let individual states determine whether a woman can terminate her pregnancy, it is more critical than ever to protect women's reproductive health in Maryland.

While the right to terminate a pregnancy up to the point of viability is codified in Maryland state law, it is not a right under the state's Constitution. Without a Constitutional protection, women's future rights could be at risk. Women and their providers are also justifiably terrified that states that restrict abortion (like Texas) will pursue them – even if these services are provided in Maryland where abortion is legal. Currently, access to abortion services is uneven. More than two-thirds of Maryland counties do not have abortion providers. It is imperative that the state fully fund and implement the 2022 Abortion Care Access Act (HB0937) to expand affordable, accessible abortion care throughout our state.

There is a further need to improve access to other types of reproductive and gynecological care in Maryland, and to reduce the disparities in birth outcomes – especially for Black women. While infant mortality rates in Maryland overall have declined (*Infant Mortality in Maryland 2020*), the rate for Black non-Hispanic births increased 6 percent from 2019 to 2020. Likewise, maternal mortality rates (MMR) for non-Hispanic Black women are increasing. From 2014 to 2018 the rate was four times that of White non-Hispanic women (*Maryland 2020 MMR Report*).

Another disturbing trend is the role of religiously-affiliated hospitals in denying contraceptive care, especially after birth such as tubal ligation or IUD insertion while a woman is still in the hospital. In Maryland, 23 percent of all births (*Bigger and Bigger: The growth of Catholic Health Systems*) are in Catholic hospitals.

WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities: WDC urges the state legislature to enact legislation that will protect and support women's reproductive health care, including:

- State constitutional amendment to protect a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy up to the point of viability as is currently codified in Maryland state law
- Shield law to protect women who terminate their pregnancies and their providers
- Data privacy law to prohibit the sharing of information about who is seeking to terminate her pregnancy, providing referral services, or providing health care to terminate a pregnancy



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- Expanded access to obstetric health services, including pre- and post-partum care such as doulas and counseling for post-partum depression, especially for vulnerable women
- Programs to eliminate the disparities in birth outcomes and maternal health, especially for Black women
- Expanded gynecological health services, including requiring hospitals that receive public funding to provide birth control services, or at a minimum to fully inform their patients that these services are not provided and provide adequate referrals