



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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

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Laura Stewart, 1st Vice President
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WDC 2023 Legislative Priorities Wrap-Up

So, this is what a Democratic administration looks like...

The 445th session of the General Assembly of Maryland ended at midnight on April 10, 2023. The dedicated members of the WDC Advocacy Committee, assisted by our WDC grassroots advocacy community, partner organizations and coalitions, worked tirelessly to push through a total of 40 bills dealing with issues of importance to our membership. Ultimately 21 of those 40 bills passed both chambers by Sine Die and were enacted into law. This is the greatest number of WDC supported bills passed during a legislative session since the club launched the advocacy committee.

Legislative oversight is a critical part of successful governance. Prompt execution and delays in spending plagued us during Gov. Hogan's tenure, not to mention an extensive list of vetoed bills after each legislative session. Hopefully, with a Democratic Governor our legislative efforts will not be ignored or delayed upon execution, particularly important social programs. In fact, Governor Moore proudly stood on the floor of the General Assembly when they gavelled out the 445th session of the Maryland General Assembly. [Click Here](#) for a list of passed bills that have been approved by the governor and enacted into law. Any bills not vetoed or signed by May 30th will be enacted.

Several of the bills enacted this year required a multi-year advocacy effort, including important bills such as the Safe Harbor bill protecting victims of child sex and human trafficking, Jaelynn's Law requiring safe storage of firearms and youth suicide prevention, and the *Repeal of Spousal Defense* in the criminal law. After a 4-year battle led by the Women's Pre-Release Equity Coalition to pass legislation creating and then funding a community-based pre-release center to provide re-entry services to women being released from the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women, the General Assembly allocated \$8 million dollars over the next 3 years for this project.

One of our newest issue areas and a trending national topic - Reproductive Health and Justice – experienced great success out of the gate with four bills enacted that will strengthen reproductive protections and increase access not only for Maryland residents, but also for those seeking reproductive care from other states with restrictive laws. WDC also created a new ad hoc committee – Advancing Democracy in Maryland (ADM) – with the goal of supporting legislation that empowers voters, creates equality of voice and representation, and ensures the responsiveness of government institutions. The ADM committee ushered 4 election related bills through the legislative process, none of which were enacted this session. Two of the cornerstones of our advocacy – Children & Youth and Health – continued to focus on important social infrastructure enhancements and experienced legislative successes such as transparency in our schools, childcare programs, food resiliency, behavioral healthcare, medical assistance programs, public health commission, medical bill financial assistance. WDC also advocated for two bills to support Governor Moore's priorities to end childhood poverty and

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help working families, as part of his goal to “leave no one behind”- permanent extension of the Maryland earned income and child tax credit for lower income working families and accelerated implementation of the \$15 minimum wage starting January 2024 - although the Governor's request to annually adjust the minimum wage for inflation did not pass.

Although we are proud of our legislative wins this year, there is still much work to be done on important bills that did not survive the legislative process this year; most notably, the *Synthetic Turf – Chain of Custody* bill we have been trying to push through for three years. The *Access to Care Act* that would establish a Qualified Resident Enrollment Program for immigrants without permanent residency status such as DACA recipients was another disappointing miss this year. However, Senate Bill 806, which passed, requires the creation of a report identifying affordable health care coverage for residents not eligible for other programs due to immigration status.

Each bill WDC supported during the 2023 Maryland legislative session is listed below along with the final status and a brief bill summary of those bills that passed. For a more complete record [click here](#) to access bills on the MGA website by typing the bill number in the search field (i.e., HB123, SB123, HB1234, SB1234).

Respectfully,

JoAnne Koravos
WDC Advocacy Chair

Diana E. Conway
WDC President

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WDC 2023 ADVOCACY ACCOMPLISHMENTS BY ISSUE AREA

Affordable Housing

Aging

Children & Youth

Criminal Justice Reform

Health

Immigration

Women's Reproductive Health & Justice

Working Families and Economic Security

Advancing Democracy in Maryland

❖ Affordable Housing

Chair, Janet Frank

WDC testified in writing and in-person in favor of a bill to require asbestos disclosures for condominiums. We also testified in favor of a bill for development of a pilot program to provide funds for affordable housing in Maryland. Unfortunately, neither bill made it out of committee. We are disappointed that the two pieces of affordable housing legislation WDC supported did not pass in the 2023 session and hope these two bills will be reintroduced next session.

➤ Failed, Withdrawn, or Redirected

HB52 (Condominiums - Sales Contracts - Asbestos Disclosure)

HB60/SB315 (Housing Innovation Pilot Program and Housing Innovation Fund - Establishment (Housing Innovation Pilot Program Act of 2023))

❖ Aging

Chair, Liza Smith

Unfortunately, due to the budget, the **House Bill 28 - Income Tax Credit for Caregivers of Senior Family Members** did not pass this year. Based on the Fiscal Note, the Department of Legislative Research could not comprehensively analyze the program's total cost. In addition, the state projected reduced revenues, making passing noble legislation such as this difficult. As chair of the WDC Aging Committee, I am deeply disappointed that HB28 could not pass this year, but I remain hopeful that we can get our legislators to look at ways to make this legislation a reality in the future. I know how important it is for caregivers to receive help and recognition for

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what they are doing for their senior family members. Therefore, I will continue to advocate for legislation providing income tax credits and other support for caregivers to get some financial relief.

➤ **Failed, Withdrawn, or Redirected**

HB28 (Income Tax – Credit for Caregivers of Senior Family Members)

❖ **Children and Youth**

Chair, Cynthia Rubenstein; Members: Melissa Bender, Tazeen Ahmad, JoAnne Koravos, Diana Conway (Environment), Laura Stewart (Education)

WDC's Children and Youth Committee advocated for 11 bills this session and 5 bills made it past the finish line. Those bills, signed into law, will positively impact the wellbeing of Maryland's children, youth and families: supporting child care access, family and medical leave, the food resiliency system, behavioral healthcare, and better addressing the adjudication of sexual misconduct in schools.

➤ **Children and Youth Bills Passed**

HB16 (Primary and Secondary Education – Title IX – Notice (Hear Our Voices Act))

Requiring each public school to provide information to students, faculty, staff, and parents regarding who serves as the Title IX coordinator for the school, the process in place for filing a sexual misconduct complaint, and the support measures that are in place for filing a sexual misconduct complaint and how to access the support measures.

HB32/SB124 (Maryland Food System Resiliency Council)

Establishing that the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council is in the Office of Resilience in the Maryland Department of Emergency Management; and altering the process for electing a co-chair of the Council.

HB495/SB350 (Early Childhood Development - Child Care Scholarship Program - Alterations)

Prohibiting the State Department of Education from increasing the copayment levels, reducing the reimbursement rates, reducing the income eligibility requirements, or implementing an enrollment freeze for the Child Care Scholarship Program in effect as of January 1, 2023, unless certain conditions are met.

HB988/SB828 (Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program -

Modifications) modifies the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program by clarifying and altering certain provisions relating to the administration of

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the Program; establishing the employer and employee shares of the total rate of contribution; prohibiting the total rate of contribution from exceeding 1.2% of an employee's wages; requiring the State to pay for certain contributions for certain covered employees; requiring the Maryland Department of Health to reimburse certain community providers for certain employer contributions in a certain manner; etc.

HB1148/SB582 (Behavioral Health Care - Treatment and Access (Behavioral Health Model for Maryland))

Establishing the Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access to make recommendations to provide appropriate, accessible, and comprehensive behavioral health services that are available on demand to individuals in the State; establishing the Behavioral Health Care Coordination Value-Based Purchasing Pilot Program in the Maryland Department of Health; requiring the Department to apply for certain federal planning grant funds; requiring the Department to apply to participate in a certain demonstration program; etc.

> Failed, Withdrawn, or Redirected

HB82/SB201 (Maryland Medical Assistance and Children's Health Insurance Programs - School-Based Behavioral Health Services - Reimbursement)

HB87/SB52 (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs - Waiver - Diapers and Menstrual Hygiene Products)

HB299 (Environment - Synthetic Turf - Chain of Custody)

HB399 (Gasoline-Powered Leaf Blowers - State Purchase and Use - Prohibition)

HB628/SB557 (Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion)

SB353 (Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Alterations)

❖ Criminal Justice Reform

Chair, Carol Cichowski; Members: Fatmata Barrie, Margaret Barry, Leslie Hawes, Lynn Olson, Fran Rothstein, Peggy Sands, Holly Syrrakos, Beth Tomasello

In 2023 we had some important victories and frustrating losses. Wins included the passage of legislation that we have long sought for the protection of women and children. For example, marriage will no longer be a viable defense to sexual assault by a spouse; access to guns by minors will be limited by storage requirements; and young victims of sex traffickers will no longer be treated as criminals. While we were also heartened by the passage of a bill to remove some barriers to employment for previously incarcerated people, we were very disappointed by inaction on other legislation relating to juvenile justice and the inhumane treatment of people behind the walls of Maryland prisons. Addressing

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racial inequities in Maryland's criminal justice system and promoting smart approaches to public safety remain key WDC priorities.

➤ **Criminal Justice Reform Bills Passed**

HB3/SB185 (Maryland State Police Gun Center – Firearms Surrendered Under Final Protective Orders)

Altering the purpose of the Maryland State Police Gun Center to include the tracking, screening, and vetting of all firearms surrendered under final protective orders in the State; and requiring each law enforcement agency to report to the Center the number and type of firearms surrendered, the jurisdictions where the firearms were surrendered, and certain information regarding the individual who surrendered each firearm under final protective orders.

HB4/SB129 (Criminal Law - Sexual Crimes - Repeal of Spousal Defense)

Repealing a certain prohibition on prosecuting a person for rape or a certain sexual offense against a victim who was the person's legal spouse at the time of the alleged rape or sexual offense.

HB97/SB37 (Criminal Procedure - Expungement of Records (REDEEM Act of 2023))

Providing that any unpaid court fees or costs are not a bar to a certain expungement; requiring a court to waive any court fees and costs associated with the charge being expunged when ordering or effecting a certain expungement; adding malicious destruction of property to the list of misdemeanor convictions that may be expunged; and altering the waiting periods applicable to the filing of petitions for expungement of convictions of certain crimes.

HB297/SB292 (Criminal Law - Victims of Child Sex Trafficking and Human Trafficking - Safe Harbor and Service Response)

Altering procedures that a law enforcement officer and a court are required to follow when the law enforcement officer or court has reason to believe that a child who has been detained is a victim of sex trafficking or a victim of human trafficking; providing that a minor may not be criminally prosecuted or proceeded against under certain provisions of law for a certain offense if the minor committed the offense as a direct result of being a victim of sex trafficking or being a victim of human trafficking; etc.

HB307/SB858 (Firearm Safety - Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn's Law))

Altering a certain provision relating to the storage of firearms and ammunition in a location that can be accessed by an unsupervised child; and requiring the Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services to develop a youth suicide prevention and firearm safe storage guide, with recommendations from a stakeholder committee.

HB1071 (Criminal Law and Procedure - Cannabis - Fines for Smoking in Public, Stops, and Searches)

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For the purpose of altering the maximum fines for smoking cannabis in a public place; prohibiting a law enforcement officer from initiating a stop or a search of a person, a motor vehicle, or a vessel based solely on certain factors; prohibiting, under certain circumstances, a law enforcement officer from conducting a search of a certain area of a motor vehicle or vessel; providing that evidence obtained in violation of certain provisions of this Act is not admissible in certain proceedings; and generally relating to cannabis.

➤ **Failed, Withdrawn, or Redirected**

HB64/SB87 (Office of the Attorney General - Correctional Ombudsman)

HB96/SB93 (Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act))

HB385/SB459 (Correctional Services - Restrictive Housing - Limitations (Maryland Mandela Act))

HB412 (Criminal Law - Sexual Crimes - Consent and Second-Degree Rape)

HB523/SB759 (Correctional Services - Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act))

HB1114 (Education - Prohibited Behavior on School Grounds and Property - Application)

HB1180/SB850 (Criminal Law - Youth Accountability and Safety Act)

❖ **Health**

Chair, Margaret Hadley; Member: Sharon Cranford

Our Health Advocacy helped pass three significant bills this year that should lead to improved health outcomes for Marylanders.

➤ **Health Bills Passed**

HB111/SB026 (Maryland Medical Assistance Program, Maryland Children's Health Program and Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment)

Requiring the Maryland Department of Health to establish an Express Lane Eligibility Program by January 1, 2025, to enroll individuals, based on certain eligibility, in the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and the Maryland Children's Health Program; and requiring the Workgroup on Low-Income Utility Assistance to submit a final report to certain committees of the General Assembly by January 1, 2024, of its findings and recommendations, including recommended legislative and regulatory changes.

HB214/SB281 (Establishment of a Public Health Commission)

Establishing the Commission on Public Health to make recommendations to improve the delivery of foundational public health services in the State; requiring the Commission to conduct an assessment of the foundational

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public health capabilities of the Maryland Department of Health and local health departments; requiring the Commission to submit to the Governor and certain committees of the General Assembly an interim report by December 1, 2023, and a final report by December 1, 2024, of the Commission's findings and recommendations; etc.

HB333/SB404 (Hospitals - Financial Assistance - Medical Bill Reimbursement)

Establishing requirements related to the reimbursement of out-of-pocket costs paid by certain hospital patients who were eligible for free care, including requirements related to the consideration of data and the reporting and disclosure of certain information; authorizing the Commission to impose a fine of up to \$50,000 per violation if a hospital fails to provide refunds to qualifying patients; making a violation of the Act an unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice subject to penalties under the Maryland Consumer Protection Act; etc.

❖ Immigration

Chair, Fatmata Barrie

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. This is the second year HB588 has not passed.

➤ Failed, Withdrawn, or Redirected

[HB363/SB806 \(Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and Maryland Department of Health - Health Care and Dental Care Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants - Report\)](#)

[HB588/SB365 \(Health Insurance - Qualified Resident Enrollment Program \(Access to Care Act\)\)](#)

❖ Women's Reproductive Health and Justice

Chair, Ginger Macomber

This Session, the Maryland legislature acted decisively to protect women's reproductive health by passing four key bills, with the support of Governor Moore. These bills will ensure that Maryland women continue to have access to the full range of reproductive health care and that their privacy is protected. Women and their providers will also be shielded from prosecution by other States with more restrictive laws. Montgomery County D16 (now)

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State Senator Ariana Kelly, D20 State Senator Will Smith, and D15 State Senator Brian Feldman were leaders in ensuring the passage of these bills.

➤ **Reproductive Health & Justice Bills Passed**

HB0705/SB0798 (Right to Reproductive Freedom) provides for a referendum to be placed on the 2024 General Election ballot to amend the Maryland State Constitution that will, upon approval, guarantee that everyone has the fundamental right to reproductive freedom regardless of any future legislative action, including but not limited to making and effectuating decisions to prevent, continue or end one's own pregnancy. Recent polling shows that 78 percent of Marylanders support this Constitutional amendment.

HB0808/SB0859 (Reproductive Health Protection Act) will "shield" women patients, their providers, and their support networks from legal action by a State (such as Texas) where health care that is legal in Maryland, is illegal in that State. "Legally protected health care" includes all lawful reproductive health services, medications, and supplies related to the direct provision or support of care related to pregnancy, contraception, assisted reproduction, and abortion. The bill prohibits the Court from requiring a person to give testimony or a statement or produce evidence for a case involving an alleged violation of the criminal law of another State relating to abortion care.

HB0812/SB0786 (Protected Information and Insurance Requirements) prohibits health records about abortion and other reproductive health services from crossing state lines through health information exchanges and prohibits the dispensing of information relating to Mifepristone (the main medication used in medical abortion) from being shared without patient consent. A person who knowingly violates this prohibition is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to a fine of up to \$10,000 per day.

HB0477/SB0341 (Reproductive Health Services Plans) requires State public higher education institutions to develop and implement a reproductive health services plan in consultation with their students. The plan must provide for student counseling and access to a broad range of reproductive health care, either on-campus (including through vending machines) or through off-campus referrals. Reproductive health care includes obtaining all FDA-approved contraception, including emergency contraception; the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV prevention; abortion care services; and 24-hour access to over-the-counter contraception.

These bills complement the **2022 Abortion Care Access Act HB0937/SB0890** sponsored by MoCo (then) Delegate Ariana Kelly and passed over then Governor Hogan's veto, to expand the supply of qualified abortion care providers to include nurse-practitioners, nurse midwives, and

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physician assistants; create a clinical training fund; make the State's existing abortion care coverage under Medicaid permanent; and require private health insurance plans (with exceptions for those with religious or legal exemption) to cover abortion care without cost-sharing or deductibles. On his first full day in office, Governor Moore released \$3.5 million to expand abortion care training.

❖ **Working Families and Economic Security**

Chair, Ginger Macomber

This session, the Maryland legislature passed two bills to support Governor Moore's priorities to end childhood poverty and help working families, as part of his goal to "leave no one behind."

➤ **Working Families & Economic Security Bills Passed**

HB0547/SB0552 (Family Prosperity Act) permanently extends the temporary expansions to the Maryland earned income tax credit, expands the State's child tax credit and eliminates an existing limit on the value of the State refundable earned income credit for individuals without qualifying children. It continues to provide for an additional State child tax credit of \$500 for each child and clarifies the age limit as under six years or under 17 years with a disability. It raises the qualifying taxpayer income limit for the child tax credit from a federal annual adjusted gross income of \$6,000 to \$15,000.

HB0549/SB0555 (Fair Wage Act) accelerates the State's current \$13.25 per hour minimum wage to \$15 starting in January 2024 versus the previous timetable of 2025. However, the Governor's request that the minimum wage be annually adjusted for inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) did not pass. WDC supported this provision. Montgomery County's minimum wage is adjusted for inflation. The County's minimum wage starting July 2023 for large employers (those with 51 employees or more) will be \$16.71 per hour.

➤ **Failed, Withdrawn, or Redirected**

HB0349/SB0345 (Maryland Fair Scheduling Act)

❖ **Advancing Democracy in Maryland**

Co-Chairs, Fran Rothstein, Lynn Olson, Beth Tomasello; Members, Kathleen Matthews, Cynthia Rubenstein, Liza Smith, Cynthia Terrell

Our new ad hoc committee, Advancing Democracy in Maryland, is guided by many of the recommendations of the 2020 report, [Our Common Purpose](#):

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[Reinventing Democracy for the 21st Century](#), issued by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship. While there are a number of bills that have been introduced in the current legislative session, we believe the number one priority is to adopt House Bill 344, which would allow Montgomery County to adopt ranked-choice voting for local elections. The Women's Democratic Club has continued to endorse versions of this bill since the 2019 legislative session, but it has never made it to a floor vote. In Montgomery County, ranked-choice voting is supported by the Montgomery County Council, county legislative delegation, League of Women Voters, Do the Most Good, Sierra Club, and Our Revolution.

➤ **Failed, Withdrawn, or Redirected**

HB344 (Montgomery County - Voting Methods)

HB417 (General Assembly - Special elections to fill a vacancy in Office)

HB643/SB176 (Election Law-Insufficient Number of Candidates for a Primary Election)

HB563/SB366 (General Assembly Vacancy - political Party Central Committees - Procedures)

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