



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

[www.womensdemocraticclub.org](http://www.womensdemocraticclub.org)

**Montgomery County  
Women's Democratic Club  
2024 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 engaged members, including numerous elected officials. WDC members work together to elect Democrats, keep voters informed, advocate for state and local issues of key importance to women and families, and educate our Montgomery County communities on critical issues.

During the 445<sup>th</sup> legislative session we saw a "new day" in Annapolis after the inauguration and launch of the Moore-Miller administration. It was gratifying to experience our Democratic Governor Wes Moore working together with legislators, advocates, and stakeholders on behalf of all Marylanders. Significant legislative advances were made in 2023 and we look forward to that collaborative engagement continuing in Annapolis for the upcoming session.

In 2024 WDC will carry its advocacy forward in alignment with Governor Moore's overarching goal of "leave no one behind." We'll be addressing the issue areas of 1) Advancing Democracy in Maryland, 2) Affordable Housing, 3) Aging, 4) Children and Youth, 5) Criminal Justice Reform, 6) Encouraging an Equal Rights Amendment Resolution, 7) Environment, 8) Health, 9) Immigration, 10) Reproductive Health and Justice, and 11) Working Families and Economic Security. It's a long list but each issue is meaningful and important to Maryland's women and families. Each of these eleven priorities has been carefully developed using a lens of racial, social, environmental, and economic equity.

WDC understands that Maryland's fiscal picture currently includes considerable forecasted financial constraints. Based on July 2023 projections from the Maryland Department of Legislative Services, the state's recent annual structural surpluses in the hundreds of millions of dollars will turn to structural deficits in the hundreds of millions by fiscal 2025. We also understand that these projections will be on legislators' minds as they grapple with how to best serve Marylanders while ensuring the current and future fiscal health of the state.

WDC acknowledges the hard work and decisions that Maryland's legislators will be making on behalf of Marylanders. We welcome inquiries and any questions or requests may be directed to Tazeen Ahmad, President or Melissa Bender and Cynthia Rubenstein, Advocacy Committee Co-Chairs. WDC looks forward to a productive legislative year working alongside our Montgomery County State Delegation.

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## **WDC 2024 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES**

**Advancing Democracy in Maryland**  
**Affordable Housing**  
**Aging**  
**Children and Youth**  
**Criminal Justice Reform**  
**Encouraging the Equal Rights Amendment Resolution**  
**Environment**  
**Health**  
**Immigration**  
**Reproductive Health and Justice**  
**Working Families and Economic Security**

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### **ADVANCING DEMOCRACY IN MARYLAND**

Fran Rothstein, Beth Tomasello, Lynn Olson, Co-Chairs

#### **CORE ISSUES:**

The Advancing Democracy in Maryland Subcommittee's overriding principle is making Maryland a model of a voter-engaged, voter-responsive state. We Marylanders are proud of the many ways our state embraces democracy, and yet there are still many ways to improve. We propose to strengthen our democracy in the short term through these measures:

- Special elections: We seek to eliminate central committee appointments to state legislative positions in most circumstances. Of our current delegation, 41% were initially appointed by the county central committee, most of whom were not voted in by residents of the districts for which appointments were made. We demand the right to vote for those who represent us in Annapolis. This is a fundamental right that must be restored. Several reform options have been considered in recent years, including several drafted by members of the Montgomery County delegation, and we strongly encourage the state delegation to act on this issue this year after significant scrutiny by the community and a record number of appointments in 2023.



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- Ranked choice voting in all elections. Ranked choice voting provides voters with an alternative to the two-party system, increases civility in political campaigning, and may lead to more diverse candidates. Ranked-choice voting saves the taxpayers money. Most importantly, ranked choice voting ensures that those elected will be acceptable to a majority of voters, not just to an often rather small plurality.
- Reduce barriers to voting through curbside voting, equitable access to early voting sites and increased use of vote-by-mail.
- Permit gubernatorial candidates to file without designating a running mate. In many elections across the nation, as well as in our Presidential elections, the winner of the primary is free to select the best running mate, who in some cases may be one of that person's primary opponents.
- Board of Election appointments. Change the appointment process for the State Board of Elections and County Boards of Elections so that Board members' political affiliations reflect voter registration in each jurisdiction.
- End gerrymandering by appointing an independent commission to draw district lines for general assembly districts and Congressional districts.
- Expand public financing to State legislative positions. Study Montgomery County's use of public financing for lessons learned and potential amendments. We should reduce the money in legislative races, and the influence of special interests with deep pockets. We should prohibit corporate donations entirely. We should expand public financing to state elected offices.
- Guarantee ballot access for people who have not been convicted of a felony who are in State or County custody or pre-trial detention.

### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Janet Frank, Chair

#### **CORE ISSUES:**

WDC supports the preservation and expansion of safe and affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families in Montgomery County. According to the Montgomery County Commission for Women, [Mothers and Poverty: An Agenda for Action](#), 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.



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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 unjust evictions. Montgomery County has a significant shortage of affordable housing available for low- and moderate-income households.

- The [Washington Council of Governments](#) estimates that the Washington region needs to add at least 75,000 additional housing units by 2030 and beyond 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 that Montgomery County has a shortage of 24,590 rental units affordable to residents who earn less than 30% of median income.
- The report also estimates that 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 in the next 10 years.
- Individuals and families of color face additional hurdles when looking for housing, and these disparities were made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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. Protecting renters from eviction is a priority for WDC. It is critical that we ensure that Montgomery County families are safeguarded from destabilizing and unjust displacement. Both the county delegation to the General Assembly as well as the County Council play an important role in creating the conditions to enable an increased supply of affordable housing.

**WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities:**

- WDC supports the prohibition of evictions without just cause from leased premises. It is critical to 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 the 2022 session only to be vetoed by the governor.



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- WDC urges the passage of HB0052 – Asbestos Disclosure on Condos, which was introduced in the 2023 session but never made it out of committee.
- WDC also urges the passage of HB0060 – Housing Innovative Pilot Program Act of 2023 – which stalled in committee.
- WDC supports the passage of HB1292 of 2023– Fire Protection and Prevention – Sprinkler Systems and Smoke Alarms – Requirements. Safe, multi-unit housing with functional fire prevention systems should be the bare minimum for Montgomery County families and communities across the state to prevent unnecessary loss of life.
- WDC supports efforts to address the supply of affordable housing units and financial 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.

### AGING

Liza Smith, Chair

#### CORE ISSUES:

Seniors' population growth: According to the “Maryland State Plan on Aging 2022-2025” the percentage of older adults continues to steadily grow and those over the age of 85 are the fastest growing segment of that population. In 2020, out of a population of 6.1 million Marylanders, 22.62% were 62 and older.

This percentage is expected to grow to 26.57% by 2040. Additionally, in 2020 62.8% of the state's older adults were residing in Baltimore City, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties; and the 60+ population in Maryland was comprised of 55.7% women vs. 44.3% men.

Economic strains: In the United States, 12.1% of women 65 and older live in poverty, compared to 7.4% of their male peers. The economic, physical, and environmental challenges that impact an aging population can have a greater impact on older female residents and their families. Older women (60+) often have lower incomes than men, are responsible for caring for elderly parents and/or other vulnerable family members including grandchildren, have limited community resources, and must bear higher medical and prescription drug costs.



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Other issues: A) Nationally, working seniors (55+) are at risk of experiencing age discrimination practices. B) It is well [documented](#) that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected women in the workforce, including older working women. C) It is also well [documented](#) that older adults, particularly older women, are targets and victims of elder fraud and abuse.

**WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities:** WDC will continue to press for legislation that supports Maryland's and Montgomery County's aging female population and their families. WDC supports legislation to ensure economic security for older working and retired women; to contribute to healthy aging; and to support affordable, compassionate elder care. WDC supports efforts to:

- Stabilize long-term care insurance premiums.
- Preserve and expand affordable rental housing for seniors.
- Expand protections and resources for caregivers of seniors, and seniors who are caregivers for other family members.
- Increase oversight on nursing homes and assisted living facilities to ensure that they are compliant with all legal requirements.
- Ensure fair and nondiscriminatory employment practices for older employees.
- Prevent and mitigate fraud and abuse that is perpetrated on the senior population.
- Support the creation, regulation, and funding of aging-in-place programs.
- Increase programming for older women to participate in community service, in particular, multi-generational engagement.

**WDC urges the reconsideration of:**

- HB0028-Income Tax Credit for Caregivers of Family Members of 2023, which was introduced but did not progress in the prior session.



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## CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Cynthia Rubenstein, Chair

### CORE ISSUES:

WDC advocates for legislation and policies directed at ensuring the wellbeing of Maryland's children and youth, especially those who are under-resourced and under-served. We support efforts on the state and county level to help children and youth grow up to be thriving and contributing young adults.

### WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities:

K12 Education: The Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Fully fund and implement with fidelity this comprehensive 10-year plan to provide an excellent and equitable education for all Maryland school systems' students. Support and hold accountable those who are responsible for the Blueprint's successful development and execution. Place a key focus on the Blueprint's Community Schools: Ensure that community, educators', and family engagement with the schools is genuine and valued. In addition, WDC acknowledges the Blueprint's June 2023 Strategic Plan with its four (4) sequenced priorities and milestones to enable all Maryland students to become successful in college-career-life:

- Students ready for kindergarten.
- Students ready to read.
- Students ready for high school.
- Students ready for college and career.

Food insecurity and nutrition: Remove barriers for all Maryland students to ensure their potential is not limited by hunger. By providing school meals at no cost to all students, Maryland can support equity in the classroom and make sure every child has the nutrition they need to strive and achieve in school. Student's food security is as important to students' academic success as curriculum or transportation are and should be treated as a critical component to education and a key complement to the aims of the Blueprint.

WDC will continue to support the following:

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

Food insecurity is a genuine issue on Maryland college campuses. WDC supports legislation and related oversight efforts to help financially strapped college students who are impacted by hunger. This includes the implementation of and sustainable funding for the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program (SB353 of 2023).



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Early Care and Education (ECE): Affordable, high quality early care and education (ECE), for children birth through pre-kindergarten, enables children, families, and businesses to flourish. ECE increases kindergarten readiness, buttresses families' economic independence, supports the ability of parents to gain and maintain employment, and enables workforce stability. In Maryland, as elsewhere, ECE is as scarce as it is precious—more so since the emergency pandemic-era Federal funding lapsed in September 2023.

WDC supports legislation to increase the accessibility of affordable, high quality ECE for families and sustainability for providers through:

- Maintaining pandemic-era funding for qualified ECE providers, whether family- or center-based, so that they can continue to provide care and education for our children and can attract and retain qualified, committed care workers and educators with living wages.
- Continuing to increase subsidies for childcare scholarships and to expand scholarship eligibility.
- Establishing and subsidizing training and apprenticeship programs for ECE workers to bolster the workforce.

Behavioral and Mental Health: Address the Opioid/Fentanyl crisis in schools, a growing issue [in Montgomery County](#) and across the state. WDC urges efforts to develop and provide evidence-based prevention and intervention programs regarding fentanyl for all ages of children in Maryland schools. We support state and county legislation that would provide for:

- Prevention and intervention programs for elementary, middle, and high schools that are developmentally appropriate for students' age ranges.
- Parent education programs that enhance awareness and support for their students and the whole family. These parent programs would be offered through schools and webinars so there is equal access for all.
- Availability of Narcan training and the dispensing of Narcan and Fentanyl test strips to be provided free of charge to families at least three times a year.
- Leveraging federal resources available to support student behavioral and mental health services within Maryland public school systems.



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Chronic absenteeism in Maryland's schools: Maryland students are considered "[chronically absent](#)" if they miss at least 15 days of school in one school year. Research shows that chronic absenteeism is correlated with poor educational outcomes and its adverse impact is currently being felt throughout the state (and nation) in K12 schools. This issue has been building over the past 4+ years and was exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic. In Montgomery County, according to MCPS data reported in the Washington Post, "About 27 percent, or about 43,000 students, were chronically absent during the 2022-23 school year. By comparison, about 20 percent, or 30,300 students, were chronically absent during the 2018-19 school year."

WDC supports legislation and policies on the state and county level that take a supportive student- and family-focused approach and address the root causes and barriers to attendance. We will not support carceral legislation or policies to address the problem.

### CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Carol Cichowski and Margaret Barry, Co-Chairs

#### CORE ISSUES:

WDC was heartened by the passage of legislation in 2023 that we have long sought for protecting the rights of women and children. However, there is more to be done to address racial inequities in Maryland's criminal justice system, inhumane and counterproductive treatment of people behind the prison walls, and Maryland's out-of-date tough-on-crime policies that do not advance public safety. Maryland remains out of step with actions taken by other states to fix problematic laws, address structural racism, and promote humane and effective policies and practices. Objectives: Criminal justice reform is vital to protecting everyone in our state and creating an environment in which women, children, and their families can thrive. We see public safety in our communities as intrinsically linked to how we treat people who are charged with crimes and who are behind the walls of the prisons. We need to ensure that the administration of justice is seen as fair and rational, and that incarceration is productive and rehabilitative, not destructive. 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—indeed, leaving no one in Maryland behind.



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**We urge the General Assembly to 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 juvenile services designed to help them to become productive adults. (HB96/SB93 of 2023).
- 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 or causation and is at odds with the principle of proportionality in our system of justice. (HB1180/SB850 of 2023)
- Establishes an independent correctional ombudsman in the Office of the Attorney General to conduct unannounced inspections of state correctional institutions and report to the public on problematic policies and practices and dangerous and unhealthy conditions (HB64/SB87 of 2023)
- Recognizes the importance of keeping families intact and strengthening bonds between mothers and children by, for example, preventing forced separation of infants from incarcerated mothers. (HB523/SB759 of 2023).
- Establishes significant restrictions on the use of solitary confinement—a practice that is considered torture under international standards and that is counterproductive due to the negative effects it can have on an individual's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. (HB385/SB459 of 2023).
- Updates the current definition of second-degree rape to specify that rape occurs when done to a person without affirmative consent and further specifies what constitutes consent. (HB412 of 2023)
- Decriminalizes student misconduct that should be treated as a violation of the student code of conduct and not a crime. (HB1114 of 2023)
- Provides resentencing opportunities to additional persons with long sentences who have served many years and demonstrated successful rehabilitation. This bill would build on the Juvenile Restoration Act.
- Removes barriers to successful reintegration for returning citizens by expanding opportunities for record expungement.
- Provides for a functional compassionate release policy. While both geriatric and medical parole are available under current Maryland law, parole is rarely granted largely due to technical and procedural barriers.
- Addresses possible inequities relating to the war on cannabis by reducing penalties for some cannabis-related parole violations, recognizing that cannabis is now part of a legal market in Maryland.



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- Provides adequate and sustained funding for the construction and operation of the Women's Pre-release Center.
- In addition, WDC urges the General Assembly not to pass legislation that would weaken or undermine the critically important juvenile justice reforms enacted in 2022 including the Juvenile Justice Reform Act and the Child Interrogation Protection Act.

### ENCOURAGING THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT RESOLUTION

Tazeen Ahmad, Chair

In 2023, one hundred years after the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was first introduced in Congress, the movement to enshrine it as the 28th Amendment to the Constitution has ramped up with new urgency.

The charge is being led by Ayanna Presley (D-MA) and Cori Bush (D-MO), in the House of Representatives, and Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), in the Senate with joint resolutions to affirm the ERA as the 28th Amendment. Rep. Pressley's discharge petition follows the July 13, 2023, introduction by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Rep. Cori Bush, in a joint resolution to Congress. The resolution states that the ERA has been ratified and is enforceable and directs the Archivist of the United States to affirm the ERA as the 28th Amendment of the United States Constitution, certify the state ratifications, and publish it in the Federal Register. The resolution counters opposition claims that the deadline to ratify has long passed with a novel legal theory that (a) since the deadline is in the ERA preamble rather than the text, it is nonbinding; and (b) if Congress has the power to impose a deadline, then Congress has the power to remove a deadline.

In our state, a new Maryland NOW ERA Task Force was established in January 2023. It is increasing awareness of the ERA among Marylanders; organizing Marylanders to take action to promote recognition and validation of the ERA as the 28th Amendment to the Constitution; and taking action to support protection, implementation, and enforcement of the Maryland state ERA (MD ERA).

**WDC joins with the Maryland NOW ERA Task Force and respectfully urges Maryland legislators to introduce and pass a resolution in the 2024 General**



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**Assembly to unequivocally affirm the Legislature's view that the federal Equal Rights Amendment is the 28<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution.**

**ENVIRONMENT**

Diana Conway, Chair

**CORE ISSUE:**

Addressing the climate crisis. The climate crisis affects every aspect of WDC's advocacy: It exacerbates the inequitable structure of our communities and threatens all sectors of society and the environment. Therefore, we ask the General Assembly to support legislation to achieve the following goals:

- Chain of custody for artificial turf fields: Requires each custodian to report to MDE the source of any artificial turf field upon acquisition, and its destination upon removal. It is purely a reporting bill, and includes no fees, permits or approval to use artificial turf fields (HB299 of 2023).
- Bills to accelerate implementation of the [Maryland Climate Pathway report](#). This overarching state climate plan will help move Maryland closer towards climate resiliency. We anticipate that possible legislation related to the plan may focus on one or more of the following, but details are still forthcoming:
  1. Support for greater PFAS regulation.
  2. Support for greater tree canopy.
  3. Support for removing trash incineration from RPS – Renewable Portfolio Standard.
  4. Support for renewed enforcement of industry compliance with emissions/contamination standards and accelerated remediation in frontline communities with legacy pollution.
  5. Support for accelerated transition to wind, solar and geothermal energy, and battery storage.



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**HEALTH**

Margaret Hadley, Chair

**CORE ISSUES:**

All Marylanders should have access to cost effective, efficient, and affordable health care and health insurance. Although Maryland made great strides in meeting that goal under the ACA (Affordable Care Act), health care and health insurance are still out of reach for many Marylanders, especially women. Even when low-income families have access to healthcare, co-pays and prescription drug costs can be unmanageable. In fact, one in four Americans aged 50 and over who have taken a prescription drug in the past five years said they did not fill a prescription written by their doctor. Cost is reported as a main deterrent. Another serious issue in the U.S. and in Maryland is maternal death rates, which are on the rise, particularly for women of color. Although there are many reasons for this, the social determinants of health remain a major factor. Public health funding and initiatives to improve our long-term care and mental health system need to be addressed, especially in areas of the state that are “provider poor”.

**Legislative Priorities:** Provide affordable and accessible healthcare for all residents regardless of their gender, race, age, immigration status or economic situation. WDC supports the continuation and creation of programs and initiatives that will provide affordable, accessible, effective, and efficient health care to all residents including legislation:

- Designed to improve/protect access to Medicaid especially for those recently removed from the program due to paperwork errors.
- That would fund Community Health initiatives in underserved communities aimed at ameliorating health disparities in vulnerable populations.
- That would protect Marylanders from the high cost of pharmaceuticals by expanding the authority of the Prescription Drug Affordability Board.
- That supports access to health insurance through the ACA for all Marylanders regardless of immigration status.
- That improves funding and other supports for community based long-term care and mental health programs and providers.
- That prevents predatory debt collection activities aimed at patients who cannot afford hospital bills.



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## IMMIGRATION

Fatmata Barrie, Chair

**CORE ISSUES:** Per the 2019 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) and Decennial Census, 15.9 % of Maryland residents are foreign born. Nearly 33% of Montgomery County residents are foreign born (341,537), an increase of 8.6% since 2010 (ACS, [www.MCFacts.org](http://www.MCFacts.org)).

According to the Immigrant Learning Center the black immigrant population in the United States is at 4.2 million, or one in 10 Black people. Like their black American counterparts, black immigrants are more likely to be stopped by police. They are also disproportionately more likely to have a criminal record and more likely to be detained and deported by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Undocumented immigrants pay about 8.3 percent of their household incomes in taxes while wealthy Marylanders pay about 6.3 percent of their household income ([Maryland's Money Matters](#)). Yet, undocumented immigrants are denied access to the benefits they pay for. Equity demands that all Maryland taxpayers and residents should have access to affordable healthcare and free legal representation.

Immigration law violations are civil violations but are implemented like criminal offenses. Unlike their counterparts who are accused of a crime, immigrants do not have the right to counsel. Any immigrant who is detained and in front of an immigration judge in immigration court has no right to appointed legal counsel. Most immigrants who end up in deportation are unable to successfully defend themselves because they cannot afford an attorney.

According to the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) “over the last 20 years (2003-2022), more than 55 percent of people appearing in immigration court were unrepresented, a statistic that is consistent with court data. Overall, immigrants are five times more likely to obtain legal relief if they are represented by counsel, and those who are detained are ten times more likely to succeed. Legal representation would advance the government’s interest in ensuring efficiency in our nation’s immigration courts— which faces a backlog of more than 2 million cases. Providing legal representation relieves a significant burden on court staff who expend valuable time assisting pro se individuals in immigration proceedings.”



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**WDC supports legislation that enables:**

- WDC encourages reconsideration of **Universal Representation** (like the 2021 bill SB317/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. (Not Passed in the previous session)
- We need 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; WDC encourages reconsideration of a bill like the **Maryland Trust Act** that has been introduced in different forms for many years. 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. (Not Passed in the previous session)
- As stated above, everyone should have access to proper healthcare. That just doesn't help the undocumented but all of us. The **Access to Care Act** (SB0365/HB0588 of 2023) defined a "Qualified resident" as an individual, including a minor, regardless of immigration status, who at the time of enrollment (1) is seeking to enroll in a qualified health plan (QHP) offered to individuals through the exchange; (2) resides in the State; (3) is not incarcerated, other than incarceration pending disposition of charges; and (4) is not eligible for the federal advanced premium tax credit (APTC), Medicaid or the Maryland Children's Health Program, Medicare, or employer-sponsored minimum essential coverage. This bill will help families fight preventable illnesses. (Did not make it out of committee in the Senate but passed through 3<sup>rd</sup> reading in the House)
- Current law requires that a licensee or potential licensee must have a social security number. Many undocumented immigrants do not have social security numbers. As stated above, many contribute to our economy. Additionally, the state already allows for people to use TIN for driving and to attend school. Therefore, enacting a law that allows the use of Tax ID Number will be in line with current state policies. A bill like last year's **Child Support Enforcement - Occupational and Recreational Licenses - Taxpayer Identification Number** (HB0136 of 2023). **HB0136** "requires a licensing authority to require each applicant for a license to disclose the applicant's taxpayer identification number if the applicant does not have a Social Security number. The licensing authority



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must record, as appropriate, the taxpayer identification number on the application. A licensing authority includes (1) specified departments of the Executive Branch; (2) the clerks of the court that are authorized to issue professional or recreational licenses; and (3) the Maryland Supreme Court. The bill also requires requests from the Child Support Administration (CSA) to a licensing authority about any obligor in arrears in paying child support – and the licensing authority's response – to include the taxpayer identification number if the obligor does not have a Social Security number.”

### 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. Over the 2023 session, Maryland took decisive action to protect women's rights to choose by passing a package of bills that guarantee the right to reproductive freedom, shield patients seeking abortion care, along with their providers and support networks, protect their health record information direct higher education institutions to provide reproductive health services for students and expand the supply of qualified abortion care providers.

**What's left to be done:** 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 are in Catholic Hospitals ([Bigger and Bigger: The growth of Catholic Health Systems](#)).

**WDC Proposed Legislative Priorities:** Support the State constitutional amendment to protect a women's right to terminate her pregnancy up to the point of viability as is currently codified in Maryland state law and help get out the vote for this referendum.



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- Support legislation that:
  - expands access to affordable reproductive health care, especially for Black women.
  - reduces maternal and infant mortality.
  - reduces disparities in birth outcomes by race.

### WORKING FAMILIES AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

Ginger Macomber, Chair

#### CORE ISSUES:

Workforce participation: Working women and their families need help. According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2022, 63 percent of women were in the civilian labor force, a decrease from prior years. Women dropped out of the labor force due to unaffordable childcare, unsafe working conditions, low-pay, and unpredictable work schedules. The pandemic exacerbated these inequities by disproportionately affecting working women. An estimated [2 million women](#) left the workforce during the pandemic.

Wage Gap: The most recent [April 2021 report](#) by the *Maryland Commission for Women*, found that the wage gap between women and men continues to widen, especially for women of color. On average, women earn 77 percent of what men earn. Women with graduate degrees earn only 72 percent of what their male counterparts earn. Recent studies have equated this pay gap to a motherhood penalty caused by women temporarily leaving the workforce or reducing their work hours to care for their children. Unlike many other industrialized countries, the U.S. does not guarantee paid family leave and affordable childcare. Women are more likely than men to be employed in education, health, and social assistance occupations, and are over-represented in retail and hospitality sectors. These are critical occupations for our economy, yet this work is often underpaid. Nationally, nearly [67 percent](#) of minimum wage earners are women. Nearly [70 percent of tipped workers](#) are women.

Income insecurity: In 2019, according to the [United Way](#), 47% of Maryland children lived in a household with an income below the basic ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) cost of living threshold. Seventy-one percent of female-headed households earned below the ALICE Threshold. The HYPERLINK "<https://assets.aecf.org/m/databook/2023-KCDB-profile-MD.pdf>" [Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Report](#) for 2023, found that twenty-five percent of children in Maryland lived in families whose parents lacked secure employment and fourteen percent



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of children lived in poverty. Twenty-two percent of female-headed households with children lived in poverty. In Montgomery County, eleven percent of children lived in poverty in 2022 - an increase over prior years.

**WDC Legislative Priorities:**

WDC has consistently advocated for bills to increase the minimum wage; provide for paid family, maternity, and sick leave; reduce the wage gap; and put more money in the pockets of working women and their families. Many of these bills have already been passed by the County Council and General Assembly. However, more still needs to be done. For example, Montgomery County passed an increase in the hourly minimum wage to \$15 with annual adjustments but excluded tipped workers. A county bill to include tipped workers has now been introduced. The State similarly passed an increase in the minimum wage to \$15 and passed legislation in 2023 to fast track its implementation but did not include a provision for cost-of-living adjustments and excluded tipped workers. A state bill to establish predictable work hours died in committee. The Time to Care Act which established a state paid family leave program passed in 2023, but implementation is still in progress and bills to amend or weaken it may be submitted.

Building on our prior efforts, WDC will continue to advocate for legislation that fosters economic security for working women and their families, reduces the pay gap caused by the “motherhood penalty,” supports essential workers, assists those who have lost their jobs or have reduced incomes because of the pandemic, protects the nascent paid family leave program, and ensure that no one working full-time is living in poverty, including legislation that provides for:

- Fair work practices, including protections and support for [essential workers](#).
- Living wage, including fair and predictable work hours.
- Ending the two-tier minimum wage rate for tipped workers.
- Women’s equality in the workplace, including equal pay and flexible schedules.
- Affordable quality childcare with fair wages for childcare workers.
- Implementation of the Time to Care Act, without rollback of its provisions.

WDC urges the legislature to establish a task force to develop a post-pandemic Marshall Plan for women, similar to the Federal initiative [H.Res.121](#) introduced by Congresswoman Grace Meng and [S.Res. 87](#) introduced by Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tammy Duckworth. Our Maryland congressional delegation has co-sponsored the Resolutions at WDC’s urging. This plan should propose a comprehensive approach to support working women and their families like other industrialized countries, and help women remain in the workforce.