



SB0484 - Criminal Procedure - Victims of Crime - Private Room

Presented to the Hon. Will Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 10, 2021 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue **a favorable report on SB0484 - Criminal Procedure - Victims of Crime - Private Room**, sponsored by Senator Shelly Hettleman.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. Victims of sexual assault, traumatized by the violation of one's bodily autonomy, often fear losing control over any sense of privacy when seeking information or assistance from local enforcement. Current practices by Maryland law enforcement do not guarantee that crime victims have the right to request private spaces to interact with their officers, nor are their agencies required to display information regarding the right to request access to such space onsite.

According to a study conducted by the National Domestic Violence Hotline,¹ victims often cite the fear of losing their privacy as a reason for failing to call or involve police after experiencing sexual crimes. Without the opportunity to request a private and safe environment for such interactions, victims may feel pressured to avoid showing emotion, or may feel a lack of respect and/or empathy from officers to disclose all pertinent information. Lack of safety and privacy may exacerbate trauma responses when describing or re-living certain details of the crimes. Law enforcement should be required to support victims, avoid re-traumatization where possible, and provide opportunities to protect the mental health of survivors willing to come forward.

SB0484 would help protect victims of crime by requiring law enforcement to display a poster informing about their right to request a private room, and to provide that room when requested. We support advocates calling for a clear and visual commitment by law enforcement officers willing and ready to assist survivors with the safety and security they need to find justice. SB0484 moves us a step forward in improving the rights of sexual assault survivors in Maryland. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0484**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ National Domestic Violence Hotline, Who Will Help Me? Domestic Violence Survivors Speak Out About Law Enforcement Responses. Washington, DC (2015). <http://www.thehotline.org/resources/law-enforcement-responses>