

BILL NO: House Bill 191
TITLE: Child Support, Custody, and Visitation – Award of Expenses – Suit Money
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: January 30, 2020
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

House Bill 191 would clarify that in certain types of family law cases a court can awards a party all the expenses involved in the case if appropriate. The Women’s Law Center (WLC) supports House Bill 191 because it may more accurately reimburse a deserving party for the cost of pursuing a proper case or defending against an improper case.

HB 191 would modify existing language about recovering counsel fees and costs with slightly broader language that accurately reflects expenses incurred for litigants in child support, custody and visitation cases. Use of the terms “reasonable and necessary expenses” defined in HB 191 as “suit money, counsel fees, and costs” clarifies for all what can potentially be awarded to a party. The WLC, in virtually every case it is involved in, represents the economically dependent spouse, and the possibility of being awarded actual reasonable and necessary expenses incurred may be helpful. It may deter frivolous or aggressive or repeated litigation, which is often a part of a power and control abuse dynamic in cases where intimate partner violence has or is occurring. We have cases where the other side walks out of a courtroom after a ruling and goes straight to the clerk to file another case. This is exhausting and expensive. We have cases where the other side bombs the client with paperwork and filings, pleadings, to try to get them to give up and succumb. In all of these cases, if they can seek actual reasonable and necessary expenses, that may help.

Therefore, the Women’s Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges a favorable report on House Bill 191.

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, membership organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change. The Women’s Law Center operates two hotlines, Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County and the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project.