



SUPPORT SB484

February 10, 2021

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Support for SB484 Criminal Procedure - Victims of Crime - Private Room

Good afternoon Senator Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings committee. My name is Michelle Lee, and I am the Victim Witness Advocacy Coordinator for the Office of The State's Attorney for Baltimore City. I am before you today in support of Senate Bill 484.

As you know, this bill requires the State Board of Victim Services to develop a poster to notify victims of the right to request a private room in a law enforcement agency or unit to report crimes. Law Enforcement agencies would be required to display the poster and provide, on request, a private room to a victim to report information related to crimes in which they were victimized. This is so important because oftentimes, victims can be re-victimized when they are forced to share intimate details of their victimization in front of passerby's and strangers. It's difficult enough for victims to have to recount the details of the crimes against them, but having supported victims of sexual assaults and hate crimes, it is even more difficult to share intimate details in an open space where there are possible triggers to them. In escorting a victim of sexual assault she was asked very intimate details of her victimization, and there was no consideration given for the fact that there were people walking by and some who seemed to linger so that they could hear her answers. With this same victim, she shut down because she saw someone who reminded her of the person who assaulted her earlier in the day. Having a private room to obtain the specific details of her assault would have been very helpful, and the detective would have gotten more immediate information from her, instead of having to reschedule the interview because the victim immediately shut down. In another incident, when accompanying a transgendered assault victim, they became very irritated when it became abundantly clear that their interview was being treated by some, as if it were some form entertainment. As the victim answered questions, giggles and inappropriate comments could be heard in the background. The victim became irate shut down and at one point indicated that they no longer wanted to go through with reporting the crime. Finally, while escorting an assault victim who was eager to share information about his assault and some other things that were happening in his neighborhood, we were caught off guard when he suddenly yelled that he was not a snitch and that the police couldn't make him talk. He had to be removed from the public area into a private room because he was so angry and unruly. It turns out that he saw someone from his neighborhood in the hallway, and he was afraid that they would tell everyone that he was cooperating with the police.

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Having posted signage in the units, just in case private room accommodations are not offered to the victims, they can read the signs and know that they have this right. As advocates, we would certainly keep victims in the loop and aware of their rights, but there are times where there may not be an advocate with victims when they report crime. Knowledge is power, and knowing that they have the right to privacy and to be interviewed in a safe space outside of the hearing and view of others should be helpful for victims as well as for the detectives who are conducting the interviews.

It is for these reasons that I respectfully ask you to vote in support of SB484.

Sincerely,

Michelle Lee