



BILL NO: Senate Bill 232
TITLE: Civil Cases - Surcharges
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: January 26, 2021
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 232.**

Senate Bill 232 allows for an increase in court filing fees to prevent further reductions in funding to Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC), the organization that makes grants for the provision of civil legal services to low-income Marylanders. Many of the service providers that comprise MNADV, provide critical legal services to victims of domestic violence. These victim service providers rely on MLSC funding to offer legal representation for domestic violence victims. Representation is critical in ensuring victim's safety with one study finding that 83 percent of victims represented by an attorney successfully obtained a protective order, as compared to just 32 percent of victims without an attorney.¹

MLSC funding has been significantly impaired by the COVID-19 pandemic while the needs of victims of domestic violence have increased. The filing surcharge fee in SB 232 will help avoid a further reduction in MLSC funding and allow MLSC and the legal service agencies that it supports to continue to provide critical legal services. These legal service agencies include many victim service providers for survivors of domestic violence who provide critical representation including assisting victims in obtaining protective orders against their abusers.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report on SB 232.**

¹ Jane Murphy, *Engaging with the State: The Growing Reliance on Lawyers and Judges to Protect Battered Women*, 11 Am. U. J. Gender Soc. Pol'y & L. 499, 511-12 (2003).

For further information contact Melanie Shapiro • Public Policy Director • 301-852-3930 • mshapiro@mnadv.org