



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 153* –
Criminal Law – Sexual Crimes - Repeal of Spousal Defense
Judiciary Committee
January 27, 2022**

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish organizations, synagogues, and schools throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work tirelessly throughout the entire region to advocate not only for the Jewish community but for our non-sectarian agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents throughout the State of Maryland.

As an advocate for the Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse (JCADA), which provides free legal, counseling, and victim advocacy services to survivors of domestic abuse, the JCRC strongly supports House Bill 153. HB 153 is essential for the purpose of repealing a certain prohibition on prosecuting a person for rape or a certain sexual offense against a victim who was the person's legal spouse at the time of the alleged rape or sexual offense.

The JCRC also understand that victims of sexual assault already face so many barriers to reporting their victimization, including stigma, fear of re-traumatization by the system, and fear of not being believed. Few survivors of intimate partners sexual assault report these offenses. These factors should not be exacerbated by antiquated laws that treat women as the property of their husbands, and in so doing, undermine fundamental democratic principles of equality and fairness. HB 153 is necessary to repealing a law on the books which allows for marriage to be a defense to sexual assault. For these reasons, the JCRC supports HB 153 and urges the committee to give a favorable report.