

February 28, 2022

Maryland House Judiciary Committee

Room 101, House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: Support for HB 1319, An Act Concerning Family Law -
Grounds for Divorce - Gender Transition**

To the Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Lauren Adams, and I am the Legal Director of the Women's Liberation Front (WoLF), a national feminist 501(c)(3) non-profit which fights for the rights of women and girls. On behalf of WoLF, I stand in support of HB 1319 because it would provide a vital exit for people, especially women, who need to exit unhealthy and unsafe marriages, and may have no other recourse given to them under Maryland law.¹

As an initial matter, while the intent and practical effect of the bill are good - and will provide real relief for women who need it - the language used in this bill endorses problematic faith-based concepts like "gender transition" and "gender confirmation surgery" which originate from a belief that humans can change sex, or that sex is a personal identity rather than a biological fact. This presents two problems: 1) Codification of these terms further entrenches them into Maryland state law, and represents state endorsement of this belief system; and 2) It requires a person seeking relief under this provision to also endorse and assert belief in these concepts.

As noted in an article on late-transitioning spouses and domestic abuse:²

What could be more coercive than repeatedly claiming your partner's sense of reality, understanding of science and anatomy (that humans cannot change sex), was wrong? That what these women see, what these women feel, what these women know, is untrue because he says so?

¹ The reality of life for women trapped in marriages should be required reading for those who may be skeptical of passing this bill. Resource page found here:

<https://www.transwidowsvoices.org/useful-resources>

² Domestic Abuse Related to Late-Transitioning Spouses, Dr. Em, Nov. 3, 2020, found at <https://uncommongroundmedia.com/domestic-abuse-related-to-late-transitioning-partners-part-i-coercive-control/>

In phrasing things the way this bill does, a woman seeking a divorce on these grounds would have to nonetheless, for the purposes of divorce law, sign off on her husband's fractured version of reality.

WoLF requests that the Committee consider amending the bill to fix this deficiency. However, adopting the bill in its current form is **far** preferable to the status quo, and so we urge the Committee, regardless of whether it is amended, to move forward favorably on this bill.

As a final note, the state of Maryland ought to revisit the divorce statute entirely. While this bill should be adopted, it would not be necessary if it were not so difficult for people to seek freedom from unhappy, unhealthy, toxic marriages.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on this important issue.

Regards,

Lauren Adams

Legal Director

Women's Liberation Front