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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 887
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The House of Ruth Maryland is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. The House of Ruth Domestic Violence Legal Clinic has offices in Baltimore City, Prince George’s County, Montgomery County, and Baltimore County. House Bill 887 would authorize a protective order petitioner to request a status/review hearing. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 887.**

Under current law, petitioners in protective order cases only have two remedies to address any issues that may arise while a final protective order is in place: contempt and modification. It is difficult for petitioners, the majority of whom are self-represented, to pursue these remedies, as both have complicated procedural and legal hurdles.

This is particularly so for contempt proceedings following a recent decision by the Court of Special Appeals that clarifies the circumstances in which a court may use the power of contempt to enforce the terms of an order. The Court stated that a “[c]ivil contempt cannot be imposed to ensure a person’s continued compliance, but must be withdrawn once compliance is achieved.” This means that petitioners cannot invoke the power of contempt to enforce compliance with a final protective order. For example, the court could not make a finding of contempt against a respondent in a protective order case who continually violates the visitation schedule established in a protective order. In that situation, a status hearing would give the court the opportunity to monitor the respondent’s adherence to the order.

House Bill 887 would give protective order petitioners a straightforward means of asking the court to hold a hearing and address any ongoing issues related to the protective order case. This will enhance the safety of victims of domestic violence and their children and give them greater access to the courts.

The House of Ruth urges a favorable report on House Bill 887.