



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

Keeping Members
More Informed,
More Connected, and
More Politically Effective

Striving for
Racial, Social,
and Economic
Equity for
Women and
their Families

Tazeen Ahmad, President

Cynthia Rubenstein, 1st Vice President

Lisa Fuller, 2nd Vice President

Melissa Bender, 3rd Vice President

Mary Lou Fox, Treasurer

JoAnne Koravos, Secretary

WomensDemocraticClub.org

WDC 2024 Legislative Priorities Wrap Up

The 446th legislative session ended on April 8, 2024, and with it the second legislative session of Governor Moore's term. The dedicated members of the WDC Advocacy Committee, assisted by our WDC grassroots advocacy community, partner organizations, and coalitions, worked tirelessly to advance a total of 44 bills and resolutions dealing with issues of importance to our club membership. **Ultimately 21 of those 44 passed both chambers by Sine Die, the final day of session, and were enacted into law.** WDC's Advocacy Committee continues to grow in numbers and in organizing power, with the committee now over 30 members strong across ten issue area subcommittees. This session the Advocacy Committee made permanent its previous ad hoc subcommittee on Advancing Democracy in Maryland and established a new subcommittee dedicated to Environmental issues.

The presiding officers of the Maryland General Assembly, Senate President Bill Ferguson and House Speaker Adrienne Jones, were forced to grapple with a more challenging fiscal environment this year, with the expiration of federal relief dollars and a growing structural budget deficit. These fiscal constraints meant that policymakers had to make hard choices of what programs to fund and how to ensure they passed a balanced budget. Budgets are moral documents, and WDC was proud to advocate for women and families in this year's budget negotiations. Lawmakers also addressed the tragedy of the Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore in the waning days of session, quickly advancing an aid package to support dockworkers and community members affected by the Bridge collapse and closure of the Port of Baltimore. [Click here](#) to see a list of the bills that passed both chambers and have been signed into law by the Governor. Any bills that the Governor does not veto or sign by May 30th automatically become law, through a process known as the "pocket veto." For a deeper dive into the legislative session, the nonpartisan Dept. of Legislative Services produces an excellent [90 Day Report](#).

Like last year, several of WDC's priority bills finally passed after a multi-year advocacy effort, including a bill *Defining Consent* in Maryland's sexual assault statute, a bill creating a *Correctional Ombudsman* to conduct much-needed oversight over the state prison system, and a *Synthetic Turf Disclosure and Study* bill requiring a study of artificial turf fields and disposal methods of used fields. WDC also continued our advocacy on intersectional policy issues supporting the health, economic security, and well-being of all Marylanders, including immigrants, through the *Access to Care Act*, which allows immigrants to purchase health insurance on Maryland's health insurance exchange.

One of the Governor's major priorities this year was to address housing affordability and improve the supply of housing for Maryland families, the first time in many years that Maryland's Governor has tackled this issue head on. WDC worked to complement the Governor's housing agenda, with our two priority bills passing supporting a *Housing Innovation Pilot Program* as well as a second bill on tenant and homeowner safety, requiring *Condominium Sales Contracts Asbestos Disclosure*.

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WDC championed the needs of children, youth, families, and seniors by helping to defend the ***Childcare Scholarship Program*** from onerous co-pay increases for low-income families in the state budget bill, tackling food insecurity and nutrition for Maryland's public schools' students, wrestling with the issue of chronic absenteeism in schools, addressing school safety, as well as reducing the burden of expenses borne by caregivers who care for their own family members. We also built on recent victories in the reproductive health space, supporting successful legislation to increase ***Contraceptive Access at Maryland's Community Colleges***, to create a ***Grant Program Supporting Abortion Clinic Security*** for patients and providers, and to improve ***Maternal Health***.

Aligning closely with the Maryland Women's Legislative Caucus, we were thrilled to fight for the state resolution affirming that the Equal Rights Amendment is already the 28th amendment to the U.S. Constitution. With the passage of the ***ERA Resolution***, the MD General Assembly sent a strong message to our Congressional delegation, the Biden Administration, and other federal counterparts, strengthening the case for the amendment's adoption.

WDC did encounter some advocacy challenges this year, particularly on bills related to democracy and legislative vacancy reforms, environmental protection, and criminal and juvenile justice reform. Some of these roadblocks were the result of disagreement and competing visions between the House and Senate or lack of consensus on the issue among lawmakers. We will continue to work with state policymakers to address their concerns and to pursue evidence-based policy solutions that center the lived experience of women moving into the 2025 legislative session.

Each bill WDC supported during the 2024 Maryland legislative session is listed below along with the final status and a brief bill summary of those bills that passed. To learn more about WDC's 2024 Advocacy Committee and how you can join our all-volunteer team, please contact us at advocacy@womensdemocraticclub.org.

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President

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Advocacy Co-Chair

Cynthia Rubenstein
Advocacy Co-Chair

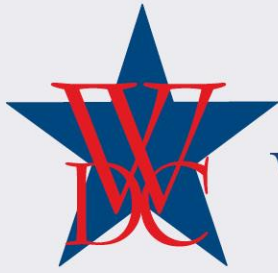
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WDC 2024 ADVOCACY ACCOMPLISHMENTS BY ISSUE AREA

- Advancing Democracy in Maryland
- Affordable Housing
- Aging
- Children and Youth
- Criminal Justice Reform
- Encouraging the Equal Rights Amendment Resolution
- Environment
- Health
- Reproductive Health and Justice
- Working Families and Economic Security

ADVANCING DEMOCRACY IN MARYLAND

Co-Chairs: Fran Rothstein, Beth Tomasello; Members: Ginna Ingram, Lynn Olson, Liza Smith

2024 was a disappointing session for the Advancing Democracy in Maryland (ADM) bills in the Maryland General Assembly. The ADM Subcommittee supported many worthy bills, most of which failed to pass or even get a hearing. Several priority bills would have improved our elections process; only one of those – a bill proposed by the Governor to protect election officials from threats and harassment – passed, but without WDC's proposed amendment to extend those protections to unpaid election volunteers outside polling places. We also supported a bill that would have limited voting-related disinformation on large social media platforms; it passed, but in a form that was gutted by amendments.

Advancing Democracy in Maryland Bills Passed

SB 480/HB 585 (Protecting Election Officials Act of 2024) This bill prohibits anyone from threatening to harm an election official or an immediate family member of an election official because of the election official's role in administering the election process. A violation of the Act is a misdemeanor and subject to maximum imprisonment of 3 years or a fine not exceeding \$2,500, or both.

HB333 (Election Law-Election Misinformation Election Disinformation and Improper Influence Related to Voting) This bill makes it a misdemeanor for an individual to deliberately disseminate incorrect information on the time, place, and manner of an election, election results, or voting rights. Requires the State Board of Elections (SBE) to maintain a website portal for the public to report election misinformation and for the SBE periodically to review the submissions and if necessary, issue corrective information or refer submissions to the State Prosecutor.



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Failed, Withdrawn or Redirected

SB29 (Special Elections-Procedures and General Election Vacancies and Ties) and HB49 (General Assembly-Special Election to Fill a Vacancy in Office)

HB347/SB 140 (General Assembly Vacancy-Political Party Central Committee-Procedures)

HB331 (Election law – Candidate Expenditures – Campaign-Related Caregiving Expenses)

HB 423 (Montgomery County – Voting Methods)

HB479/SB372 (Election Law-Deadline for Selection of Lt. Governor)

HB257/SB99 (Election Law-Affiliating with a Party and Voting-Unaffiliated Voters)

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

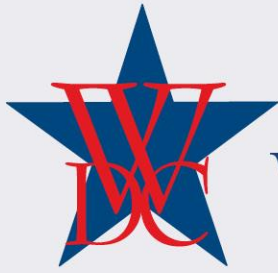
Chair: Janet Frank

The Affordable Housing Subcommittee provided testimony in favor of two bills to promote safe and affordable housing in Maryland. Both bills passed the legislature. Affordable housing was a key area of focus this year for both the Governor and the Legislature. There was substantial effort and energy for passing bills this session that would help ameliorate the shortage of affordable housing across the entire state. Both bills that passed this year had been introduced previously in 2023 and failed. This year they met with success. For the upcoming session, in 2025, we hope and expect that additional legislation will be fostered to improve the affordability and safety of housing for Maryland (and Montgomery County) residents.

Affordable Housing Bills Passed

HB7 (Housing Innovation Pilot Program and Housing Initiative Fund-Establishment-Establishment Housing Innovation Pilot Program Act) This bill establishes a pilot program to create a model for new affordable housing opportunities by rewarding public housing authorities that have introduced innovative housing programs.

HB143 (Condominiums-Sales Contracts-Asbestos Disclosures) This bill establishes a requirement to increase disclosure regarding the presence of asbestos when a condominium unit is being sold.



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AGING

Chair: JoAnne Koravos; Members: Diana Rubin, Liza Smith

The Aging Subcommittee considered four bills to improve the lives of the aging population in Montgomery County and the role of their caregivers. Unfortunately, only one of the bills met with success this session. **Senate Bill 202, Department of Aging - Caregiver Expense Grant Program – Established** passed, while a related House Bill 32, Income Tax - Caregiver Tax Credit, did not get out of committee. SB0202 was introduced in 2022 and 2023 in similar form. This bill will establish the *Caregiver Expense Grant Program* in the Department of Aging to award grants up to certain caregivers for up to 30% of the qualified expenses that exceed \$2,000 paid or incurred by the caregiver to provide care or support to certain qualified family members; and authorizing the Governor to include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of up to \$5,000,000 to the Program. Bill HB0349/SB063, Department of Aging - Long-Term Care Insurance – Study was withdrawn early while sponsors continue to look for a responsible agency to do the work. Relevant to both the WDC Aging and Health issue areas, bill HB0340/SB0388, Prescription Drug Affordability Board - Authority for Upper Payment Limits and Funding (The Lowering Prescription Drug Costs for All Marylanders Now Act), requiring an increase in appropriations, did not get out of either committee. We will advocate for these bills in 2025.

Aging Bills Passed

SB0202 (Department of Aging - Caregiver Expense Grant Program – Established)

Failed, Withdrawn, Redirected

HB0349/SB063 (Department of Aging - Long-Term Care Insurance – Study)

HB0340/SB0388 (Prescription Drug Affordability Board - Authority for Upper Payment Limits and Funding), (The Lowering Prescription Drug Costs For All Marylanders Now Act)

HB0032 (Income Tax - Caregiver Tax Credit)

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Chair: Cynthia Rubenstein; Members: Melissa Bender, Dia Costello, Karen Finn, Lisa Fuller, Laura Stewart

WDC supports efforts to ensure the wellbeing of Maryland's children and youth and help them grow up to be thriving and contributing young adults. In 2024 our subcommittee addressed four issue areas: food insecurity and nutrition of children in public schools, safe schools and learning environments for children and youth, early childhood education, and student chronic absenteeism. Our members advocated for six different bills, five of which passed the legislature this year.



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Children and Youth Bills Passed:

SB79/HB696 (Primary and Secondary Breakfast-Lunch Expansion Report) As originally proposed, the bill would have expanded free breakfast and lunch to all students in Maryland public schools. The original bill was heavily amended due to legislators' concerns over its fiscal note. The passed bill requires the State Department of Education to estimate and report to the legislature on the cost to provide breakfast and lunch to all students in Maryland public schools. This will be a starting point for advocacy in 2025.

HB1167/SB1090 (Maryland Center for School Safety-Secure Schools Emergency Response Grant Program-Established) sets up a Grant Program administered by the Center to provide funds to improve emergency notification systems and communications between public schools' personnel, a public safety answering point, and a public safety agency during emergencies. It also requires that the Program is operating and available to each county board by September 1, 2026. It authorizes but doesn't require the Governor to include an appropriation for the Program in the annual budget.

SB113/HB99 (Sexual Solicitation of a Minor Through Child Pornography-Prohibition) expands sexual solicitation of a minor to include the production of child pornography. The bill prohibits an individual from knowingly and with intent soliciting a minor or a law enforcement officer posing as a minor to engage in sexual acts by a certain means.

SB500/HB600 (Childcare Career and Professional Development Fund-Alterations) includes a service obligation for Fund award recipients to work in an approved childcare setting for at least 20 hours per week. It expands eligibility for certain applicants and requires repayment of certain awards if the service is not performed.

SB362/HB352 Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) WDC weighed in to urge protection of the Childcare Scholarship Fund. We advocated for adequate funding to maintain childcare slots and opposed proposed copays by families of 7% of their annual income. Fortunately, conference committee deliberations between House and Senate legislators delivered \$488 million in new funds to cover 2023-24 shortfalls and support the program for 2025. The onerous family co-pays were eliminated.

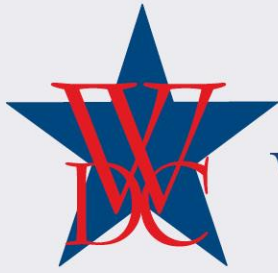
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SB865 (Juveniles-Truancy Reduction Pilot Program-Expansion)

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Co-Chairs: Carol Cichowski, Margaret Barry; Members: Fatmata Barrie, Jane Harman, Lynn Olson, Fran Rothstein, Holly Syrrakos, Beth Tomasello

In 2024 WDC had two big successes and several disappointments. Firstly, sex without consent will now be considered rape under Maryland law. The use or threat of force will no longer be a required element of



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second-degree rape. Secondly, Maryland's prisons will now be subject to much-needed independent oversight by a correctional ombudsman who will be empowered to investigate and report on a system that has been characterized by dangerous, inhumane, and unhealthy conditions.

Unfortunately, no legislative action was taken to limit the use of solitary confinement in Maryland prisons, end the forcible separation of babies from mothers who have given birth while incarcerated, or otherwise address the vestiges of mass incarceration. The General Assembly rejected bills that would have given individuals behind the prison walls who are sick or old, or who have spent decades in prison a better chance for release and three other bills that would have helped previously incarcerated individuals to reintegrate into their communities by removing records that impede access to employment, housing, and other services. In the area of juvenile justice, it was disappointing that the legislature passed a bill rolling back various evidence-based reforms made in 2022 by the Juvenile Justice Reform Act, a bill that WDC supported. We hope that the newly established Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices will closely review the implementation of the changes in the law and recommend any adjustments needed to improve outcomes for justice-involved youth.

Criminal Justice Reform Bills Passed

HB496/SB758 (Criminal Law – Sexual Crimes – Definition of Consent and Repeal of Force)

Requires certain facts to be considered when determining whether a lack of consent exists for the purposes of certain sexual crimes; and alters the elements of second degree rape to remove the requirement of use of force or threat of force.

HB297/SB134 (Office of the Correctional Ombudsman – Establishment and Funding) Establishes the Office of the Correctional Ombudsman authorizing the Justice Reinvestment Oversight Board to make a recommendation for the distribution of money from the Performance Incentive Grant Fund to the Office; requires the Office to conduct investigations, reviews, and assessments of administrative acts taken by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, by the Department of Juvenile Services, or in relation to individuals confined by either department; provides for the confidentiality of certain communications.

Failed, Withdrawn, Redirected

HB724/SB123 (Criminal Procedure – Petition to Reduce Sentence)

HB118/SB128 (Correctional Services – Geriatric and Medical Parole)

HB191/SB71 (Correctional Services – Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act))

HB1144/SB1085 (Corrections – Segregated Housing – Limitations)



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HB73/SB454 (Criminal Procedure – Expungement – Completion of Sentence)

HB658/SB602 (Criminal Procedure – Automated Expungement, Waiting Periods, and Adverse Actions - Clean Slate Act of 2024)

SB1030 (Criminal Procedure – Expungement of Records – Good Cause)

ENCOURAGING THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT RESOLUTION

Tazeen Ahmad, President WDC

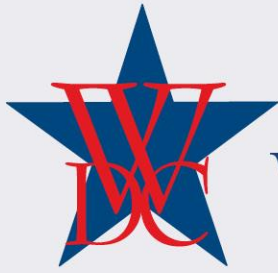
Equal Rights Amendment Resolution Passed

SJ1(Equal Rights Amendment Resolution) In 2024, WDC joined Maryland NOW, Free State Justice and AAUW Maryland to create the Maryland Equal Rights Action Network— MERAN—to coordinate ERA advocacy efforts across the state. This network included 37 organizations from across the State, from Garrett County to Talbot County, and from local commissions for women, LGBTQ+ advocacy groups, black women, university women, and business professionals that worked together to urge Maryland legislators to introduce and pass an Equal Rights Resolution to unequivocally affirm the legislature's view that the federal Equal Rights Amendment is the 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Resolution SJ1 was cosponsored and championed in the legislature by Senator Ariana Kelly and Delegate Edith Patterson and readily passed both chambers in the General Assembly.

This resolution urges President Biden to publish the Federal ERA as the 28th Constitutional Amendment and presses Congress to pass a Joint Resolution affirming the same. Maryland was one of the first states to ratify the ERA in 1972. More than 50 years later Maryland will now continue the battle towards ensuring the Constitutional codification of equality nationwide.

With the growing number of states imposing restrictions and outright bans on women's rights to access health care, WDC applauds lawmakers for taking up this resolution. While Marylanders and those in 22 other states are fortunate to have state ERA protections in place, those state protections may be in jeopardy as long as the federal Constitution does not include the ERA as the 28th Amendment. WDC is grateful to President Tazeen Ahmad who led our efforts on behalf of this resolution alongside Senator Kelly, Delegate Patterson, many other supportive legislators, and scores of ally organizations who made certain this resolution was successfully passed in 2024.



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ENVIRONMENT

Chair: Diana Conway; Members: Lavontte Chatmon, Susan Dankoff, Liisi Fidler, Mary Gant, Enid Light, Ginny Strasser.

The brand new WDC Subcommittee on the Environment took on five bills addressing the following issues: (1) Tracking used artificial turf fields to prevent improper disposal; (2) securing safe playground materials with caps on lead and PFAS; (3) removing incineration from the Renewable Portfolio Standards; (4) diverting single-use bottles from litter through a bottle bill; and (5) phasing out certain gas-powered lawn equipment used by the state.

Environment Bills Passed

HB457 (Synthetic Turf - Disclosure and Study) Directs the Department of the Environment to conduct a two-year study of artificial turf in Maryland including existing fields and current disposal methods for used fields, in consultation with stakeholders including manufacturer-producers, buyers, users, and community stakeholders. This protects water and soil from toxic leachate and microplastic contamination.

HB1147 (Playground Surfacing Materials – Prohibitions) The bill prohibits installation of any new playground surfaces unless they are certified to contain lead levels below 90 parts per million, and are certified to contain no intentionally added PFAS. This protects children, water and soil from exposure to lead and PFAS contamination.

Failed, Withdrawn, Redirected

HB166/SB146 (Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources – Alterations)

HB0735/SB642 (Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program)

HB91 (Fossil Fuel-Powered Lawn and Garden Care Equipment - State Purchase, Use, and Contracts – Prohibition)

HEALTH

Chair, Margaret Hadley; Member: Sharon Cranford

WDC's Health Advocacy Subcommittee helped pass two significant bills this year that should lead to improved health care access and outcomes for Marylanders.

Health Bills Passed

HB728/SB822 (Health Insurance – Qualified Resident Enrollment Program) Access to Care Act. This bill will allow all residents of Maryland including undocumented immigrants to purchase health



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insurance plans through the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange contingent on approval of a waiver application to the Federal Government. The waiver is required as federal law prohibits undocumented immigrants from participating in plans through the Affordable Care Act.

HB328 (Hospitals – Financial Assistance Policies – Revisions) This bill will alter the required contents of a hospital's financial assistance policy so that the provision of no cost or reduced-cost medically necessary care and payment plans be consistent across all hospitals in Maryland. It will remove the requirements that provision of reduced-cost medically necessary care and payment plans be in accordance with the mission and service area of the hospital – used by many hospitals to deny free or reduced cost care to otherwise income eligible patients living outside of the hospital defined service area.

Failed, Withdrawn, Redirected

HB340 (Prescription Drug Affordability Board – Authority for Upper Payment Limits and Funding) (Lowering Prescription Drug Costs for All Marylanders Act of 2024).

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND JUSTICE

Chair: Ginger Macomber; Member: Stephanie Castro

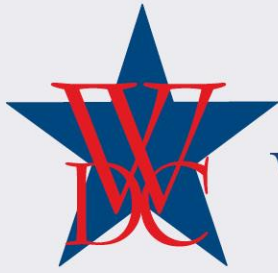
In the 2024 session, the Maryland legislature passed three more bills to protect women's reproductive health. These bills, together with significant legislation passed during the 2022 and 2023 Legislative Sessions, will ensure that Maryland women have access to the full range of reproductive health care without fear of harassment or retaliation.

Reproductive Health and Justice Bills Passed

HB0367/SB0527 (Community Colleges – Contraception – Access Requirements) requires each State community college in consultation with students and student organizations, to develop and implement a plan to provide all students access when on-campus to over-the-counter contraception, including through student health centers and vending machines.

HB1051/SB1059 (Maternal Health – Assessments, Referrals, and Reporting) Maryland Maternal Health Act of 2024 establishes a standard of care for high-risk pregnancies by requiring obstetric hospitals and birthing centers to complete prenatal and postpartum risk assessment forms, and report on the number and type of referrals, resources and information provided, or forfeit Medical Assistance Program reimbursements. For high-risk pregnancies, birthing facilities must also call the birthing parent within twelve hours of discharge to evaluate the parent's status.

HB1091/SB0975 (Maryland Department of Health – Reproductive Health Care Clinic Security Grant Program Establishment) Supporting Reproductive Health Care Clinics Act will provide



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grants for security measures at abortion clinics that are increasingly under attack by anti-choice advocates.

WORKING FAMILIES AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

Chair: Ginger Macomber

This Session, WDC was pleased to support three bills which tackled the economic security of working families. One of our priority bills passed, but two did not.

Working Families and Economic Security Bill Passed

HB0649/SB0525 (Labor and Employment – Equal Pay for Equal Work – Wage Range Transparency) strengthens Maryland's existing wage transparency law by requiring that employers must disclose in a public or internal posting for each job, promotion, transfer, or other employment opportunity, the hourly or salary wage or wage range, and a general description of the benefits and other compensation offered for the position. This bill clarifies that the wage transparency requirements apply to all Maryland businesses, regardless of where the employees are physically located, and requires employers to maintain compliance records for at least three years and establishes damages for non-compliance.

Failed, Withdrawn, Redirected

HB467 (Food Services Facilities and Tipped Workers – Service Fees and Tip Credits) (One Fair Wage Act of 2024) was withdrawn by the sponsor.

HB1226/SB0994 (Maryland Predictable Scheduling Act) was withdrawn by the sponsor.