



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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

Striving for
Racial,
Social, and
Economic
Equity
where
Women
and their
families live
and work

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WomensDemocraticClub.org

Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club *2022 Advocacy Priorities*

The Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC) is one of the largest and most active Democratic clubs in the County with hundreds of politically active women and men, including many elected officials. WDC members work together to elect Democrats, keep voters informed, advocate for state and local issues of importance to women and their families, and educate our community on critical issues.

The 442nd legislative session was both challenging due to the pandemic and rewarding due to progress in police reform, criminal justice, education, family protections, and healthcare. However, there is still much to be done. WDC will again bring our energy to advocating for the following priorities to champion issues that disproportionately impact women and their families.

We will continue our support for a countywide approach to view legislation through a racial, social, and economic equity lens. The theme of equity and justice is not only woven into our advocacy, it extends into everything we do. Our speaker series has attracted attendees from across the state and beyond.

The burden on women and their families in Montgomery County resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, now almost two years in duration, continues to be of urgent concern. Therefore, WDC will prioritize legislation that provides programs and funding to alleviate the current impact and long-term side effects of the pandemic.

Please feel free to direct any questions or requests to Leslie Milano or JoAnne Koravos. We look forward to an active and productive legislative year working alongside our Montgomery County State Delegation!

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WDC 2022 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Affordable Housing
Aging
Criminal Justice Reform and Public Safety
Education
Environment
Health
Immigration
Working Families and Economic Security

AFFORDABLE HOUSING –Janet Frank, Chair

Core Issues: Evictions, particularly those without just cause, have a devastating impact on residents throughout Montgomery County. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem. These evictions can lead to homelessness, job loss, income insecurity, food insecurity, and increased student transiency, among other serious impacts that reverberate throughout the community. The repercussions from these types of evictions are not easily remedied by the County, as there are already 30,000 people -- in large part women age 62+ and single mothers -- on the affordable housing waiting list in Montgomery County. At present, with just 60 days' notice and no reason provided, a tenant can be subject to eviction. It is critical that we ensure that Montgomery County families are safeguarded from destabilizing and unjust displacement. The impact on families cannot be overstated.

WDC Legislative Priorities: Prohibit evictions without just cause from leased premises and provide affordable living options for residents with fixed incomes and income insecurity with urgent protections during the pandemic. WDC supports ending the practice of evictions without just, with additional focus on other causes and remedies of housing insecurity, including:

- Requiring that a just cause is stated in the notice to vacate
- Limiting the causes for eviction to reasonable circumstances, such as tenant breach of lease, tenant engaging in illegal activity on the premises, or the unit undergoing extensive renovations



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- In the case of reasonable circumstances for eviction, increase the required number of days' notice for households with children
- The pursuit of federal, state, and local funding and mitigation programs addressing housing instability due to income loss due to COVID-19

WDC supports the passage or reconsideration of *Covid-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act* ([SB0910/HB1312](#)) and the *Montgomery County Stable Homes Act MC 12-20* ([HB0574](#)), both of which also prohibit evictions in certain circumstances. We supported these bills in 2021.

AGING –JoAnne Koravos, Chair

Core Issues: According to the Maryland Department of Aging, the percent of older citizens is increasing and individuals between the ages of 80-84 are the fastest growing segment of the population. In fact, through the year 2040, 63.8% of the state's older adults will reside in Baltimore City and in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties; and the 60+ populations in Maryland will be comprised of 55.7% women vs. 44.3% men. In the U.S., 12.1% of women 65 and older live in poverty, compared to 7.4% of their male peers. Therefore, the economic, physical, and environmental challenges that plague our aging population have a greater impact on Montgomery County's older female residents and their families. Older women (60+) are often burdened with lower incomes, caregiving situations for elderly parents or other vulnerable family members including grandchildren, limited community resources, and high medical and prescription drug costs. Working Seniors (55+) also experience a high percentage of discriminatory practices. In fact, Maryland was listed in the top 10 of states registering the highest employment-to-population ratios for workers age 55 and older with 43% of its 55+ population still working; and this was prior to the pandemic. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted women putting an increased burden on older women. Furthermore, older adults, particularly older women, are often victims of fraud and abuse. Issues impacting aging women also put a burden on their families who often depend on them for family care or additional income.

WDC Legislative Priorities: WDC urges the State Legislature to enact legislation that will support Maryland and Montgomery County's aging female population and their families. WDC supports legislation that will ensure economic security for aging women, both working and retired status; contribute to healthy aging; and support affordable, compassionate elder care, including:

- Stabilizing long-term care insurance premiums



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WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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- Preserve and expand affordable rental housing for seniors
- Expanding protections and resources for caregivers
- Increased oversight of nursing homes and assisted living facilities to ensure these facilities are compliant with all legal requirements
- Fair and nondiscriminatory employment practices for aging employees
- Safeguards to eliminate, protect, and remedy, fraud & abuse perpetrated on the senior population
- Supporting the creating, regulation, and funding of aging-in-place programs
- Increase programming for older women to participate in community service, particularly multi-generational engagement

WDC also urges the reconsideration and passage of [HB0255](#) – *Department of Aging – Grants for Aging-in-Place Programs – Funding*, to expand and establish aging-in-place programs for seniors; and, [HB0347](#) – *Criminal Law – Exploitation of Vulnerable Adult or Elderly Individual – Undue Influence*, which will redefine and clarify the term “undue influence” as it pertains to exploitation of vulnerable and elderly individuals. Both bills failed to pass last session.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM AND PUBLIC SAFETY – Beth Tomasello, Chair

Core Issues: In the past, the Criminal Justice Reform/Public Safety Subcommittee has focused solely on criminal justice and public safety legislation that only affected women and children. However, considering recent police killings of Black citizens and the much overdue attention it has drawn to racism in policing and in our criminal justice system, the Criminal Justice Reform/Public Safety Subcommittee will also be focusing on racial equity in public safety issues at the state and local level. It is the subcommittee’s view that the structural racism in policing and over-incarceration is devastating families in Black communities and communities of color and is very much an issue that bears directly on women and children. Accordingly, while the subcommittee will still be focused on legislation affecting women and youth, our work will continue to be broader than years past.

WDC Legislative Priorities: WDC urges the State Legislature to enact legislation outlining reforms of the criminal justice system to address systemic racism from first encounters with police through re-entry and parole, as well as criminal and violent activity specifically impacting women and their families. WDC supports the following actions at both the State and County levels in the areas of criminal justice reform and violence prevention:



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
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- **Juvenile Justice Reform Act:** This Bill ([HB1187/SB0853](#)) proposes numerous changes to the juvenile justice process in the State by generally implementing the recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Reform Council. However, consideration of the bill's substantive provisions was postponed until 2022 after further study is completed. WDC will be advocating for abolition of the practice of trying young people as adults. WDC has indicated to the relevant legislative committee that this bill is a high-priority bill for the club.
- **Juvenile Interrogation Protection Act:** This bill ([HB0315/SB0136](#)), which WDC supported last session, requires parents to be notified if their child is in police custody and to be given an opportunity to be present when the child is questioned. It also requires an attorney to be present before the child can be interrogated. WDC has indicated to the committee that this bill is a high-priority bill for the club.
- **Love is No Defense to Sexual Assault:** This bill ([HB0147/SB0250](#)) repeals spousal immunity to charges of rape and sexual assault. We will support this bill again in 2022 and urge passage.
- **Ghost Guns:** We urge the introduction and passage of a bill outlawing the use of untraceable guns in any form.
- **Prosecution of Excessive Use of Force Cases:** The omnibus policing reform bill ([HB0670](#)) passed in 2021 assigned the investigation of police excessive use-of-force cases to a new office within the Office of the Attorney General. The legislation failed to assign prosecution of those cases to the AG's office (or anywhere else). We urge the passage of legislation that will clarify that the AG will prosecute police excessive use of force cases.
- **Body Attachment:** Under current Maryland law, if an individual has an unpaid debt obligation that has been court adjudicated (and that would include alimony and child-support), the court can order "body attachment" and the police can arrest the debtor and put them in jail. Essentially, the current law criminalizes civil obligations and, in some respects, re-creates debtors' prisons. WDC will evaluate any legislation introduced for its impact on women and their families.
- **Sexual Harassment/Discrimination:** WDC urges the introduction of legislation that addresses sexual harassment/sex discrimination giving women a clear path for redress.
- **Elimination of the School-to-Prison Pipeline.** WDC urges the passage of legislation to remove school resource officers from Maryland's schools and incentivize investments in badly needed mental health services, wrap-around services, and restorative practices that support



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students and promote positive behavior. WDC also supports the decriminalization of typical adolescent misbehavior, such as disruption, that should be addressed by principals as a disciplinary issue, not a crime. We supported [HB0496](#) and [HB0700](#) in the last session and urge their passage.

EDUCATION – Laura Stewart, Chair

Core Issues: Maryland's national ranking for education dipped again in 2019. Less than 45% of elementary and middle school children met English and Math grade standards in the last standardized testing cycle. In Montgomery County, performance was down in seventh-grade math, Algebra 1 and English 10. There is also a severe achievement and opportunity gap, which is weakening our economic prospects. Forty-seven percent (47%) of Montgomery County students have qualified for Free and Reduced Meals at some point in their educational career. We must increase education funding to target the persistent inequities in our education system. Montgomery County enrollment continues to surge, adding more than 25,000 students over the last 10 years. Our facilities are aging, and many are over capacity, creating roughly \$1.5 billion in backlogged projects, causing health and safety issues for Montgomery County students, teachers, and staff. Everyone agrees that the education, safety, and social equality of all our children is paramount and will define the future of our state and county. The 2020 Maryland General Assembly recognized the role education plays in the future of the state when they passed the Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation. Unfortunately, Gov. Hogan's veto stalled the implementation. In the 2021 legislative session, legislators stepped up and overrode the veto ensuring funding to begin implementation, as well as revisions to address learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

WDC Legislative Priorities: WDC urges the State Legislature to enact legislation that will help close the achievement and opportunity gap for our children, provide funding and resources to address schooling in the era of COVID-19, and promote physical and mental health and wellness for our children, including:

- Support for additional Blueprint for Maryland funding to deliver the promise of this historic bill. Teacher recruitment and support is important so that we stop the loss of talent due to burnout.
- Creating a school environment that promotes health and wellness. Covid-19 highlighted disparities in school facilities.



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- More support for mental health services. Mental health of students is especially important after 18 months of isolation for some students.
- Implementing Restorative Justice and Trauma Informed Practices to restore our student's ability to reach their potential.
- Encouraging good governance practice in our school system to promote good use of our tax dollars. School boards should be compensated appropriately to attract talent that can dedicate time for oversight. Bills that require clear and transparent reporting will help the public hold school systems accountable.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT – Petra Smeltzer, Chair

Core Issues: Last session we focused on regulations governing the safe disposal of artificial/synthetic turf (synturf), which we will continue to pursue. In 2021, we also expanded our advocacy into the general areas of environmental equity and community resilience, including energy efficiency. Every resident should have an equal opportunity to protect their family from the negative impact of environmental hazards and mismanagement. In addition, Maryland and Montgomery County need to have the resilience and sustained ability to have access to available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations relating to the environment, i.e. recovery, adaptation, and growth after a disaster strikes.

WDC Legislative Priorities: Initiatives creating environmental equity and community resilience, including the responsible disposal of synturf. WDC urges state support for regulations governing the safe and responsible disposal of Synturf, and the creation of programs focused on equal environmental protections and sustainable resources, including:

- Requiring transparency and accountability regarding the disposal of synturf, i.e. chain of custody documentation
- Protections from the negative impact of environmental hazards, disaster, or pollution.
- Responsible mitigation efforts dealing with water quality, zero-waste initiative, forest conservation, and pesticide-use reduction
- Requiring the State to establish a program(s) to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

WDC supported [HB0033/SB0076](#) - *Climate Crisis and Education Act* during the 2021 legislative session. Previous versions of the bill were introduced in 2018, 2019 and 2020. WDC will evaluate a 2022 version of the bill, if introduced, to ascertain continued support. WDC also



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urges the legislature to reconsider passage of [HB0857](#) – *Synthetic Turf and Turf Infill – Chain of Custody and Reuse*.

HEALTH – Margaret Hadley, Chair

Core Issues: All Marylanders should have access to cost effective, efficient, and affordable health care and health insurance. Although Maryland made great strides in meeting that goal under the ACA, health care and health insurance are still out of reach for many Marylanders especially women. Those who have left the work force due to Covid-19 – and many of them are women – also lost access to employer-based health insurance. Even when low-income families have access to healthcare, co-pays and prescription drug costs can be unmanageable. In fact, one in four Americans aged 50 and over who have taken a prescription drug in the past five years said they did not fill a prescription written by their doctor. Cost is reported as a main deterrent. Another serious issue in the U.S. and in Maryland is maternal death rates, which are on the rise, particularly for women of color. Although there are many reasons for this, the social determinants of health are a major factor. Public health funding and initiatives to improve our mental health system need to be addressed, especially in areas of the state that are “provider poor”. During the Covid-19 health emergency telehealth has had a positive impact on treatment availability in underserved and rural areas. Making the change in regulations permanent will help maintain that progress.

WDC Legislative Priorities: WDC urges the State Legislature to enact legislation that will provide affordable and accessible healthcare for all residents regardless of their gender, race, age, or economic situation. WDC supports the continuation and creation of programs and initiatives that will provide affordable, accessible, effective, and efficient health care to all residents, including legislation:

- Designed to improve/protect provisions of the ACA especially access to Medicaid.
- That would fund Community Health initiatives in underserved communities aimed at ameliorating health disparities in vulnerable populations.
- That would prevent or protect Marylanders from health issues related to environmental degradation.
- That would add additional protections to state laws allowing a woman's right to make her own healthcare decisions regarding reproductive health.
- That supports and encourages behaviors that thwart the spread of COVID-19 in all populations across the county and state.



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- That improves funding and other supports for community mental health programs and providers.
- That prevents predatory debt collection activities aimed at patients who cannot afford hospital bills.
- That expands the use of telehealth availability especially for mental health treatment.

IMMIGRATION - Fatmata Barrie, Chair

Core Issues: WDC is keenly aware of the important role immigrants continue to play in our communities. Foreign-born residents now make up more than one-third of the population in Montgomery County. Central to the successful integration of our immigrant community is access to resources and equitable social networks to help their families and children thrive.

According to the 2019 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) and Decennial Census, 15.9 % of Maryland Residents are Foreign Born compared to 13.7% of U.S. Residents. Almost 1/3 of Montgomery County residents are foreign born – an increase of 8.6% since 2010 (ACS, www.MCFacts.org). Adding the children of foreign-born parents pushes that percentage close to 45%!

From a public safety and criminal justice perspective - like their Black American counterparts, Black immigrants are more likely to be stopped by police. They are also disproportionately arrested. Therefore, they are more likely to have a criminal record and to be detained and deported by ICE. This is called the “prison to deportation pipeline.” However, unlike their non-immigrant counterparts who are accused of a crime, immigrants do not have the right to counsel. Therefore, most immigrants who end up in deportation are not able to successfully defend themselves because they do not have money to hire an attorney. Deportation rips apart families and puts a disproportionate burden on immigrant women and children.

According to an Immigration Fact Sheet released by the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, Maryland remains a major destination for both authorized and unauthorized immigrants and over 45% of immigrants to Maryland reside in Montgomery County, the highest percentage in the state. In fact, over 50% of foreign-born residents in the county are women and approximately 30% of our school age children have one or both parents who are foreign born. *For this reason, WDC has decided to add Immigration to our priorities watch list.*



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WDC Legislative Priorities: WDC understands there are other advocacy organizations that specifically address immigration. However, due to current events the plight of immigrants and refugees to the United States has intensified concern for immigrant women and their families. Therefore, WDC will monitor legislation introduced in 2022 and identify bills that specifically address issues that disproportionately impact the economic security, education, healthcare, and public safety of immigrant women and their children.

Possible Legislation for support might include:

- *Universal Representation (SB0317/HB0750):* Hundreds of immigrants in Maryland are detained in local jails through immigration detention agreements that ICE has with certain counties, and when facing deportation, they do not have a right to a lawyer. We must ensure that all Marylanders who are in detention and facing deportation have access to justice in the form of zealous legal counsel to represent them in removal proceedings.
- *Maryland Trust Act (SB0088/HB0304):* The Trust Act is legislation that will increase the safety of Maryland families by improving community relationships with law enforcement and other state entities through limiting the state's partnership with national efforts to enforce federal immigration laws. The Trust Act would allow for vulnerable immigrants to be more willing to report crimes, use available health and social services for their families, and enroll their children in school.

WORKING FAMILIES AND ECONOMIC SECURITY COMMITTEE – Ginger Macomber, Chair

Core Issues: According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, women make up 63 percent of the civilian workforce in Maryland and 66 percent of the workforce in Montgomery County. However, a June 2021 report by the *Maryland Commission for Women*, found that the wage gap between women and men has continued to widen, especially for women of color. On average, women earn 77 percent of what men earn. Even women with graduate degrees earn only 72 percent of what their male counterparts earn.

Some recent studies have equated this pay gap to a motherhood penalty caused by the lack of paid maternity, family, and sick leave; affordable quality childcare; and society's expectations that women should have the primary responsibility for child and elder care. Women are more likely than men to be employed in education, health and social assistance occupations, and are also over-represented in the retail, restaurant and hospitality sectors – jobs that are often classified as essential services. According to a recent *New York Times* analysis, one in three jobs held by women has been designated as essential. This work is often underpaid and unseen – yet critical to keeping our country running and to caring for our most vulnerable citizens.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
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Nearly 60 percent of minimum wage earners are women. 22 percent of female-headed households with children in Maryland live in poverty, and 71 percent earn below the basic cost of living (ALICE Threshold).

The COVID pandemic has exacerbated these inequities by disproportionately affecting working women. 11.3 million jobs held by women have been lost since the Spring of 2020. Many women are dropping out of the labor force because of unaffordable childcare, unsafe working conditions, low-pay, and unpredictable work schedules.

Childcare has reached a crisis. Maryland has some of the highest childcare costs in the US – averaging \$13,500 per year for infant care – more than the annual \$10,779 tuition cost for the University of Maryland (which is publicly subsidized). The median family would have to spend 17.6 percent of their household income to place one child in childcare. Childcare workers earn just above the minimum wage and cannot afford to send their own children to unsubsidized childcare. There has been a drop of 36 percent in the childcare workforce since the start of the pandemic and more than one third of childcare providers are considering quitting or closing their businesses because of low pay.

WDC Legislative Priorities: WDC urges the State Legislature to enact legislation that will ensure economic security for working families, reduce the pay gap caused by the “motherhood penalty,” support essential workers, assist those who have lost their jobs or have reduced incomes because of the pandemic, address the childcare crisis, and ensure that no one working fulltime is living in poverty, including legislation that provides for:

- Fair employee leave practices, including family leave
- Fair work practices, including protections and support for essential workers
- Living wage, including fair and predictable work hours
- Women's equality in the workplace, including equal pay and flexible schedules
- Affordable quality childcare

We urge the passage of *The Time to Care Act* (Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program) that failed to pass out of the assigned House and Senate Committees in 2020 ([HB0839/SB0539](#)). Passage of this legislation will provide up to twelve weeks of *paid* leave to an individual who is taking leave to care for a newborn or newly adopted child, a family member with a serious health condition, themselves if they have a serious health condition, or a



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service member who is next-of-kin or has a specified need because of the military deployment of a family member. Federal employees recently received this benefit.

We also urge the establishment of a Task Force to develop a post-pandemic Marshall Plan for women, similar to the Federal initiative [H.Res 121](#) introduced by Congresswoman Grace Meng. We need a comprehensive approach to support working women and their families like other industrialized countries, and help women re-enter the workforce as this pandemic ends.