

DC VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT

A voice for victims and children in the DC metro area since 2008

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**Testimony of Aida Vindell, Co-Legal Director
DC Volunteer Lawyers Project
Before the Committee on Human Services
Council of the District of Columbia**

B25-42: Ground for Divorce, Legal Separation and Annulment Amendment Act of 2023

INTRODUCTION:

Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Aida Vindell, and I am the Co-Legal Director of DC Volunteer Lawyers Project (DCVLP). At DCVLP we focus on trauma-informed

CLEAR PRESENTATION OF OUR POSITION:

I am here today to provide testimony in support of the “Grounds for Divorce, Legal Separation and Annulment Amendment Act of 2023”. The bill before the committee ensures that survivors of domestic violence, *including* those *without* attorneys, are provided with a fair and just opportunity to separate themselves from their abusers. The bill proposes amending three important changes to the divorce and legal separation code but today I will speak on two of those changes. *The first one*; the importance of allowing judges to award exclusive use of the family home during the initial phase of a divorce, and the *second one* giving DC residents the autonomy to decide when they should be allowed to separate from their spouse without having to experience unnecessary and intrusive waiting periods.

FACTUAL ARGUMENTS & DATA AS EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT:

I will first address awarding use and possession of the marital home during Pendente Lite hearings (PL Hearings) and why this form of relief is most important to DC residents suffering from domestic violence.

- A PL hearing is set usually upon request of one party and allows judges to hear testimony and review evidence in order to issue a temporary order on matters that are so important that waiting until a trial in that case would cause undue hardship.
- As the code is currently written, judges already have the authority to issue temporary orders at PL hearings deciding on child custody, child support, alimony, attorneys fees to enable a spouse to participate in the case with counsel and prohibit the dissipation of marital property.

PERSONAL STORY OR ANECDOTES:

CONCLUSION:

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DCVLP is a non-profit organization that was established in 2008 to provide direct legal and advocacy assistance to low-income survivors of domestic violence. DCVLP attorneys provide survivors of domestic violence with trauma-centric representation in Civil Protection Order cases, family law matters including custody, child support, and divorce, an immigration cases. In 2022, we provided legal representation to [REDACTED] in CPO matters and [REDACTED] in matters in of divorce and custody. DCVLP attorneys also provide free legal advice and brief services to survivors through our various legal clinics in the District of Columbia. DCVLP attorneys and advocates are hearing about survivors' journeys to safety almost every day and

Commented [AV1]: Need this statistic.