

# ALLIANCE for

# HOPE

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The Honorable Susan Lee  
James Senate Office Building, Room 223  
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

January 7, 2020

Dear Senator Lee,

We are writing to support your bill to amend Maryland law to make strangulation or suffocation during an assault a first-degree felony. We lead the nationally recognized Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention, a program of Alliance for HOPE International. While based in California and Washington, DC, we have worked extensively in Montgomery County, helping to plan and develop the Montgomery County Family Justice Center.

Men who strangle women are the most dangerous men in Maryland. If a woman is strangled one time by her partner, she is 750% more likely to later be killed by that same partner. We have a hashtag (#lastwarningshot) to remind everyone that so called "choking" of an intimate partner is usually the last warning before a rage-filled man kills his partner. When he kills her, he is most likely to shoot her, but the strangulation assault was the "last warning shot." And too often it is not treated seriously by police officers, prosecutors, or judges.

Men who strangle women, are not just killing women. Most victims initially survive. The predators, however, are causing brain damage and long-term health consequences in thousands of women without any significant consequence for their behavior. Brain damage or other major internal injuries can begin to occur seconds into a strangulation assault.

Men who strangle women in domestic violence situations are also the cop killers of America. Our recent published study found that in 2017, 33 out of 44 officers killed in the line of duty in the U.S. were killed by men with a history of domestic violence in the public record – many of them with a strangulation assault history against women before they killed a police officer. Maryland has repeatedly experienced this reality with officers killed in the line of duty. Men who strangle women are also the mass murderers of the United States. John Muhammed – the DC Sniper – was a domestic violence strangler. Devon Patrick Kelley in Sutherland Springs, Texas – the mass murderer in the largest killing in a church in modern American history – was a domestic violence strangler before he killed so many in a domestic violence related incident. The Air Force failed to treat domestic violence strangulation seriously which allowed Devon Patrick Kelley to kill 26 women, men, and children and seriously injure 20. Omar Mateen, the Pulse Night Club shooter, was a domestic violence strangler.

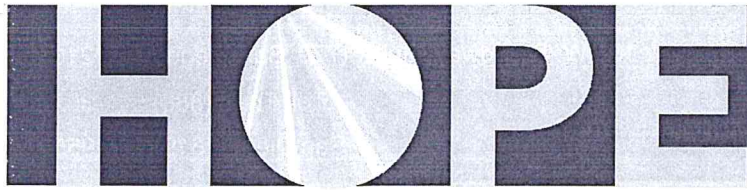
The majority of all domestic violence strangulation (historically called "choking") cases in Maryland have been treated as misdemeanors for far too long. It is time to join 47 other states that already classify strangulation and suffocation as felonies. This is not about putting more people in prison, it is about saving the lives of domestic violence victims.

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Family Justice Center Alliance ♦ Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention ♦ Camp HOPE America  
Justice Legal Network ♦ VOICES Survivors Advocacy Network



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SB 212

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It will only be a matter of time until the next officer dies, shot by a strangler, a woman is shot to death after a prior strangulation assault where the offender is released from custody, or a mass shooting occurs in Maryland where a strangler was not held accountable for a felony assault or was released from jail without consideration of the overwhelming threat to the victim and the public by his release. To date, we have passed felony strangulation laws in 47 states but Maryland, Ohio, and South Carolina lag behind our national movement.

To reiterate, this is not about adding to the prison population. The truth is that stranglers currently populate Maryland prisons for murder. Taxpayers are spending millions to lock murderers up for decades in Maryland after they have strangled an intimate partner and then later killed their partner or someone else. If Maryland started using jail and prison for only the most violent offenders – and before they kill – we would find reductions in murders in across Maryland in the years to come and find that custody pending disposition these violent offenders is, in fact, a powerful deterrent.

Thank you for taking a stand against the violent crime of strangulation. Amending Maryland law to make strangulation and suffocation felony offenses can help increase safety for many women each year across the state and help prevent homicides of women, children, and law enforcement officers as we increase accountability for the most dangerous men on the planet. We are happy to provide other information as needed. Every Democrat and every Republican should support this simple, straightforward, lifesaving, common sense bill.

Sincerely Yours,

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