

HB 126 - Peace Orders Workplace Violence

Greta Engle,
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Honorable Chairman Clippinger & Vice Chairwoman Atterbeary

I offer witness testimony today in favor of HB 126. This is a bipartisan and dangerous workplace issue. I do so while wearing many different hats. From victim employee, survivor advocate, former long-term Board member then Vice President at the House of Ruth MD to Human Resources advocate and trusted advisor.

After dissolving a relationship, I was stalked, received escalating threats, eventually assaulted several times over 6 months. I was lucky, my perpetrator and I did not share a house, children or any pets. However, the one place he knew I would always be from 8-5 daily was my workplace.

My former employer was concerned for me, and everyone else. I'd been assaulted on the road that led into our office, and in our parking lot. During the time that I filed my individual protective order, he began showing up with dozens of roses at a time for me, and our receptionist was left to greet him.

The workplace is the one refuge for anyone in this situation with a job. 1:4 women are assaulted in her lifetime. Men too are victims.

Aside from the danger to an HR professional having to terminate a violent or aggressive employee, intimate partner violence is always present in the workplace. It's often dangerous to everyone in that workplace, not just the individual target.

If I shared a home or children with my perpetrator, I may have not felt it worth personal risk to file a protective order. Not having to face this man at home, I was willing to take that risk. My employer was left having to watch on the sidelines. HR and our CEO had little that they could do to deter or keep this person away from our office. I had evidence I could've shared to help them meet burden of proof standards. They desired the safest possible workplace protection while all employees were at the office, and surrounding property. The employee parking lot was considered public property, and he leveraged this to his advantage waiting there for me frequently or approaching coworkers to ask if I'd been at work that day.

Human behavior is impossible to predict, less so when a perpetrator becomes irrational and when they've been "wronged" in some way. Employers need tools like HB 126. Tools to protect all employees, and as another option for an employee in fear of filing their own protective orders with increased risks of physical violence to themselves, their children, or household pets.