

Kristin Burr Hill

Regarding Judicial Proceedings Hearing Related to SB0128

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My name is Kristin Burr Hill and I am a concerned citizen who has become a domestic violence advocate in my free time.

In 2021, my best friend and maid of honor, Lauren Charles, was brutally murdered by her husband in Silver Spring, MD. His sentencing in 2023 made me aware of this bill and how it could be putting women's lives at risk.

Ultimately, I believe this is a good bill. Many studies have been done on recidivism in older Americans and they generally find recidivism rates to be around 3%. However, none of these studies have isolated domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is unique from other violent crimes in both motive and opportunity. Further, unlike other violent crimes, less than 2% of domestic abuse cases result in jail time. Most cases of violence are not even reported to the police. This means that rates of "true recidivism" — meaning actions that result in a legal conviction — is not the standard for which we can determine success when it comes to domestic abuse. Additionally, I want to note that black women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse. 41% of black women are physically abused by a romantic partner in their lifetime and black women are 3x more likely to be murdered by a partner over any other racial group. The State of Maryland should have a greater interest in ensuring that people are safe within their homes.

Lauren's murderer is an example of where this bill has failings. He was convicted at age 45. He has a history of domestic abuse that is not on his criminal record and was not presented as evidence at his trial. In fact, other witnesses told me they refused to testify about his violence towards them because they were afraid for their safety. He is likely to have a good criminal record because he only has exhibited violent behavior towards women. He has a history of relying on women for his financial welfare. The parole commission will consider recidivism rates generally, because there is no other data to consider. Under this bill, he could be released at age 60 and, needing a place to live, move in with another woman he meets online. And, I don't think his situation is unique.

I'm asking that you consider expanding the sexual violence exception in § 7-310(A)(3) to include domestic abuse as defined in Maryland Family code. This will ensure that people with a documented history of hurting family members will not be given the opportunity to do it again.

If you are unwilling to make this change, then I'd ask that you expand the list of factors that the parole commission may consider in §7-305 to include things such as :

- Evidence of domestic abuse outside of the incarcerated individuals criminal history;
- Whether the crime was domestic abuse as defined by the Maryland Family Code;
- The lack of data for geriatric recidivism related to domestic abuse; and/or
- What the incarcerated individual's living situation will be and/or may be in the future; especially considering previous patterns

The parole commission are not experts on domestic abuse and expecting them to be is setting them up for failure. Instead, I'm asking you to lay these factors out for them.

I know we all have the same goal of finding a way to work towards criminal justice reform while also keeping people, especially black women, safe in their homes. I want to thank all the members of the Judiciary Proceedings Committee for hearing me out and being dedicated to keeping women safe in the State of Maryland. Your consideration of these additions to SB0128 means a lot to me and can save lives. While we couldn't save Lauren, I am dedicated to doing what I can to help other victims become survivors.