

**Maryland General Assembly
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Wednesday, February 7, 2024 at 2pm
Hearing on SB0128, Correctional Services – Geriatric & Medical Parole**

Good afternoon, Senator Hettleman and members of the committee. My name is Noelle Melton, and I am a resident of Takoma Park, MD where I live with my husband and three young children.

I am submitting my written testimony today first to inform you of the dire possible consequences presented by SB0128, the bill which was reintroduced in January 2024 to make changes to Maryland's geriatric parole policy, **and second, to urge you to expand the sexual violence exception in Section 7-310(A)(3) to include domestic abuse as defined by Maryland Family code to protect and save the lives of women and families** or make other similar changes as recommended by Kristin Burr in her testimony at today's hearing.

In March 2021, **Lauren Charles, a Silver Spring resident** and friend of our family, **was brutally murdered in her sleep at home by her husband**, who viciously beat her with a statue and shoved a pillowcase down her throat. In 2023, he was convicted at the age of 45 and sentenced to 55 years to life. It was later learned that prior to this, her killer was also previously named in a protective order and an ex-girlfriend of his also submitted a written statement at his sentencing that he tried to suffocate her with a pillowcase. **Under your bill, Lauren's killer would be eligible for parole in 14 short years, leaving other women's lives in danger upon his release.**

Lauren was a successful, outgoing, 40 year old black woman with her whole life ahead of her. FOX5 created a special on Lauren's story which you can find here: <https://youtu.be/wrfmar27IS0>.

While studies on recidivism in older Americans show low recidivism rates, none of these studies isolate domestic abuse or consider that less than 2% of domestic abuse cases ever even result in jail time to begin with. This means that rates of "true recidivism", or actions that result in a legal conviction, is not the standard for which we should determine success when it comes to domestic abuse. **The findings of these studies are being conflated, and the resulting bill, SB0128, puts women and families in jeopardy of domestic violence.**

I strongly support the main premise of your legislation, but in its current form, it still prioritizes the early release of domestic violence felons over the safety of women and families and puts women at serious risk of facing a similarly horrifying end of life as Lauren. Homicide is the #2

cause of death in black women ages 1-19 years old, and the #4 cause of death to black women ages 20-44. **Maryland legislators should have a strong interest in ensuring that people, especially those most vulnerable like black women, are safe within their homes.**

I urge you to make the changes above to SB0128 to continue to protect women and families from such brutal actions. Thank you for your time for holding this hearing today and for hearing from your constituents and concerned members of the public.