

School of Nursing

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

January 8, 2020

Dear Senator Lee and Delegates Pippy and Atterbeary,

I am writing in strong support of your bill to amend Maryland law making strangulation or suffocation during an assault become an assault in the first degree. I am a nurse, a Professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, live in the city of Baltimore and have been conducting research on domestic violence and health outcomes here in Maryland since 1993. I have more than 280 publications and 7 books on violence and health outcomes and am nationally known for my research on risk factors for homicide. My federally funded research established that intimate partner strangulation was a strong risk factor for intimate partner homicide. That study was conducted in Baltimore as well as in 11 other cities across the country. We found that abused women who were strangled by a husband, boyfriend or ex-husband or ex-boyfriend were 750% more likely to be murdered by that man.¹ We have also done research on the importance of the health care system in identifying women who have been strangled and providing appropriate care here in Baltimore. Our research team's studies show that approximately 68% of women abused so badly that the police were called in Oklahoma reported that they had been strangled one or more times by their abusive partner. Those who had been strangled more than once were more likely to have had a miscarriage than abused women never strangled.²

I also work with the national Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention program (funded by the Office on Violence Against Women in the US Department of Justice) as a member of their Medical Advisory Committee. Through my work with that team I have learned much about how state laws on strangulation can strengthen the criminal justice system attention to these extremely dangerous abusers and sexual assaulters. Also important is how legislation provides an impetus to the health care system to better identify strangulation victims and attend to their injuries so that lives can be saved. A woman is at increased risk of death in the 24-72 hours after a non-fatal strangulation from a stroke or a carotid artery dissection (tear) if not correctly diagnosed and treated. In working with the Institute, I

¹ Glass, N., Laughon, K., Campbell, JC, Block, C. R., Hanson, G., Sharps, P. W., Taliaferro, E. (2008). Non-fatal strangulation is an important risk factor for homicide of women. *Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 35, 329-335.

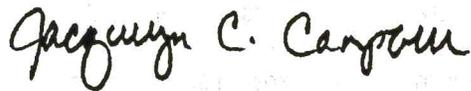
² Messing, J. T., Patch, M., Wilson, J., Kelen, G., & Campbell, J. C. (2018). Differentiating among attempted, completed and multiple nonfatal strangulation of female intimate partner violence victims. *Women's Health Issues*, 28(1), 104–111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2017.10.002>

have been chagrined to learn that 47 of our 50 states already have state laws strengthening penalties for strangulation. Let us make sure that Maryland becomes one of those states.

Our science is also showing that men who strangle women are causing brain injury and long-term health consequences in the thousands of women in MD who are strangled by the partners but survive.³ There were at least 15,000 Domestic Violence incidents in the state of MD in 2016, the latest year for which that data is available. Only about half of DV victims report the crime to police, suggesting about 30,000 DV victims in Maryland. The vast majority of those victims are women. A synthesis of all the research suggests that at least 10% of abused women have been strangled by their partners and 68% of women abused so severely that police were involved have been strangled by the men who abused them. Bottom line, we can confidently estimate that at least 3000 and as many as 10,000 women in Maryland are strangled every year. These women are at significantly increased risk to be killed by that partner resulting in lifetime trauma for their children.

Thank you for introducing this important legislation for the state of Maryland. Amending Maryland law to make strangulation and suffocation a first degree assault can literally save lives of abused women in our great state. This is not a partisan issue. It is a matter of increasing safety and saving lives for thousands of our domestic violence victims and their children.

Sincerely,



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³ Campbell, J. C., Anderson, J. C., McFadgion, A., Gill, J., Zink, E., Patch, M., Callwood, G., & Campbell, D. W. (2018). The Effects of Intimate partner violence and probable traumatic brain injury on central nervous system symptoms in women of African descent. *Journal of Women's Health* 27(6) published online. <http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/jwh.2016.6311>