

Written Testimony of Andrea Chamblee
SUPPORT SB 208

TO: Chairman William C. Smith, Jr., Vice-Chair Jeff Waldstreicher, and Members of the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Andrea Chamblee, Silver Spring, MD (District 19)

DATE: February 5, 2020

My name is Andrea Chamblee. I grew up in Howard County, moved to Prince George's, then Baltimore City, Hagerstown, Frederick, and Beltsville. Now I live in Montgomery County, in District-19. My husband, John McNamara, was one of the five journalists shot and killed at the Capital Gazette on June 28, 2018.

In the early morning of Thursday, June 28, 2018, my husband, John, couldn't have known he was posting his last story on the Annapolis Capital website, just after midnight. "Prince George's County State's Attorney Angela Alsobrooks took a step toward history Tuesday night, winning the Democratic Party's nomination for Prince George's County executive."

It wasn't until several hours later, after helping colleagues with other stories about the primary election results, that he headed to his car for the dark drive home.

After very few hours of sleep, John was up again, grabbed a shower, and made coffee for me. As he started for the door to go to work, and I saw the way he looked – exhausted after days of working late into the night covering the election and covering for colleagues with families who were away for the July 4th holiday.

I asked him if he could work from home. "No," he said, "I can't let my coworkers down."

He should have stayed home. If I had insisted, I just know he would have admitted I was right. I didn't insist. I told him I loved him and let him go to work -- where he was shot 3 times and killed by a dangerous man who should never have been able to get a hold of a shotgun.

My husband's killer bought his gun legally. If Maryland's Extreme Risk Protective Order had been in place a few months earlier, maybe his dangerous history would have triggered a red flag.

Even if someone had intervened and a court had issued an Extreme Risk Protection Order, he still would have been able to go out and easily buy the shotgun he used to murder 5 people without a background check, thanks to the gap in our gun laws.

I'll never let go of the feeling that I let John down when I didn't challenge him. But I wanted him to stay home because he was tired, not because I could ever have imagined he would be murdered, just for going to work. We should be worrying about whether our loved ones are getting enough sleep, not whether they're going to be the next victim of gun violence.

There's nothing I, or anyone else, can do for John now. We squandered the chance to save John.

But there are so many people who still need us, and we can't let them down. There are veterans contemplating suicide. There are women scared their partner is going to follow through on his threat to kill them and their children. There are students, afraid to go to school, unable to concentrate on lessons. There are people afraid to go to the movies, to their place of worship, to public events.

We're here to fight for this bill to prevent people from getting their hands on guns they're prohibited from having. As long as people can easily buy a rifle or shotgun without a background check, there is a serious threat to public safety in our state.

I've been called a hero in this fight as if I have some superhuman skills, stamina, or abilities to deal with my situation. I don't. I'm just living day to day, doing the best I can, wishing anything I did felt like enough.

People say, "I couldn't do what you're doing." I know they could...I hope they're grateful they don't have to. This is the life I'm living now. It could happen to any one of you.

It's too late to save John. I'm not here because it will bring back my husband. I'm here to help save the next person's husband or child or friend.

The vast majority of Marylanders support background checks on all gun sales. They know the Constitution, and they know the risk of easy access to guns, including rifles and shotguns. Listen to your constituents. Listen to the ones who speak for those who can no longer speak at all. Don't fail us.

Thank you for listening to me today. Together, we can prevent the next shooting or the next gun suicide.

Please vote to support of SB208.