



Testimony in Support of House Bill 233- Define Strangulation as First Degree Assault

The Greater Washington Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse (JCADA) **strongly supports House Bill 233 to include strangulation explicitly as assault in the first degree**, making this crime a separate felony. At JCADA, our mission is to support victims of power-based violence to become empowered and live safely; educate the community about power-based violence and appropriate responses; and prevent future generations from suffering power-based violence. We provide these services without regard to race, national origin, ability, background, faith, gender, gender identity, gender expression, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, and the clients we serve are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, harassment, elder abuse and dating violence. Last year, JCADA supported over 580 survivors of power-based violence and educated more than 2,800 youth, parents and educators about healthy relationships through our prevention program *AWARE*.

At JCADA, we provide free legal, counseling, and victim advocacy services to victims. Unfortunately, many of our clients have experienced strangulation. Knowing the horrible impacts that strangulation can have on a survivors' health and safety, we have a special protocol for assisting survivors who have reported strangulation, including an additional questionnaire to get more information about the incident, recommending forensic exams, inquiring into symptoms they may have experienced, discussion of reporting it to law enforcement or authorities, and screening for other signs of possible severe health impacts.

As you've probably been told by other medical professionals, strangulation can cause severe health impacts, including but not limited to: loss of memory or consciousness, difficulty speaking, loss of control of bodily functions in the bladder or bowels, dizziness, headache, coughing, swelling and more. More information is available from the Strangulation Institute on these potentially deadly consequences.

Additionally, many clients continue to live in fear from their partner; often one incident of strangulation or physical abuse sends a clear message to the victim that their abuser is able to do it again. As a part of the cycle of abuse, strangulation puts our clients in perpetual fear for their lives.

Unfortunately, strangulation can have long term effects. Sometimes JCADA works with clients who experienced strangulation months or years before. Sometimes when these clients have issues with memory loss or other symptoms, JCADA staff have to have the difficult discussion of whether they've suffered strangulation or other traumatic brain injury. While in some of these cases it may be too late for them to get the interventions that would have benefitted them previously, I still encourage them to seek medical care. The effects of strangulation can continue for years after the initial assault.



By including strangulation explicitly in the first degree assault statute, you are recognizing the severe harm that strangulation can have on victims. Additionally, you are making it easier for the State's Attorney's Office to hold these offenders accountable for strangulation by ensuring that it is recognized in the law as the potentially deadly crime that it is. Ensuring that this is charged as first degree assault recognizes the severe lethality associated with strangulation. According to the Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention, someone who is strangled by their partner has their odds for homicide increase by 750%.

Thank you for considering this testimony. I am available for any questions.