



COMMISSION FOR WOMEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CLUSTER

January 27, 2020

The Honorable Jesse Pippy and Vanessa Atterbeary
House Office Building, Rooms 326 and 101
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Criminal Law – Assault in the First Degree – Suffocation or
Strangulation

Dear Delegates Pippy and Atterbeary,

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission for Women (“Commission”), we are writing to express support for your above-referenced bill to strengthen Maryland law and make strangulation a felony in our state. The Commission represents the interests of women in our County who constitute more than half of the residents in Montgomery County.

The safety and security of Montgomery County women is one of the Commission’s top priorities. As a former domestic violence prosecutor, I saw an alarming number of cases where the offender used strangulation (or choking) as a form of assault against the victim. Domestic violence continues to be a safety issue for women in Montgomery County and across the State of Maryland. In our Commission’s 2018 Status of Women Report, there were approximately 3,000 instances of domestic violence in Montgomery County in 2018, and over 30,000 instances of domestic violence in the State of Maryland¹. Further, the National Institute of Health estimates that strangling is a method of assault employed in approximately 23% of domestic violence and sexual assault cases. If a woman is strangled, her rate of fatality by domestic violence-related homicide increases dramatically.²

Women who are strangled are also exposed to potential significant collateral health issues, including mental health and delayed death.³ The health of women is also one of the Commission’s priorities and we strongly support making strangulation a felony in Maryland.

¹Montgomery County Commission for Women. (2018). *A Tale of Two Counties: The Status of Women in Montgomery County*. Retrieved from: <https://stat.montgomerycountymd.gov/stories/s/2018-Status-of-Women-in-Montgomery-County/as7x-56qj/>

² Glass, N., Laughon, K., Campbell, J., Block, C. R., Hanson, G., Sharps, P. W., & Taliaferro, E. (2008). Non-fatal Strangulation is an Important Risk Factor for Homicide of Women. *The Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 35(3), 329–335. doi: 10.1016/j.jemermed.2007.02.065

³Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention. (2019). *States with Strangulation Legislation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.strangulationtraininginstitute.com/impact-of-strangulation-crimes/>

Additionally, Maryland is one of only three states and the District of Columbia that has yet to pass legislation classifying strangulation as a felony⁴. There is a clear need to create nuance in our criminal code, appropriately classifying suffocation and strangulation as serious forms of assault.

This bill protects victims of domestic violence from future and more extreme violence, and the Montgomery County Commission for Women appreciates your leadership in addressing this necessary amendment. We also urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to take swift action in supporting its passage.

Sincerely,



Nicole Y. Drew, Esq.
President

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⁴Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention. (2019). *States with Strangulation Legislation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.familyjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Strangulation-Laws-Chart-11.2019.pdf>