



January 17, 2020

Delegates Pippy and Atterbeary  
House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Delegates Pippy and Atterbeary,

I am writing in support of your proposed legislation that would make strangulation and suffocation during an assault a first-degree felony under Maryland law. As the Director of DVS Legal Services, Inc., I have seen countless cases of domestic violence involving strangulation and suffocation. Sadly, in these cases, I have also noticed that often the courts and police do not treat these cases with the magnitude that they warrant. Often, victims themselves do not understand the severity and lethality of what they almost always refer to as “choking.” As a member of several groups in Montgomery County including the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council and the Fatality Review Team, we have made it a point to educate ourselves and the community about how dangerous strangulation and suffocation really are.

As you may be aware, one in four women will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime and 68% of those victims will experience near-fatal strangulation by their partner. These victims are 750% more likely to be killed when there have been previous incidents of strangulation. The most alarming fact that I learned was that death can occur days or even weeks after being strangled even if there are no external signs of injury.

Regularly, we see cases where law enforcement, judges and even victims minimize the “choking” that occurs during an assault. While strangulation is technically covered by current Maryland law, it is a difficult concept for juries to grasp when this minimization occurs and when there are sometimes no outward signs of injury or long-term effects. Maryland is one of only three states that has failed to take this step. We must remove ourselves from that statistic. By delineating strangulation and suffocation as specific acts that fall under the definition of first-degree assault, we can help save lives and hopefully stop the continued cycle of abuse.

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Thank you for introducing and supporting this very important legislation. The work you are doing can and will save lives and help prevent dangerous abusers from continuing their patterns of abuse against their current and future victims. If there is anything that I can do to help with this bill, please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you again for your service to the state of Maryland and to the victims of domestic violence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'AP', is positioned above the typed name.

Amy Palumbo, Esq.  
Director, DVS Legal Services

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