



bMOREsafe
Mercy Medical Center

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

January 10, 2020

Dear Senator Lee and Delegates Pippy and Atterbeary:

I am writing this letter in strong support of your bill to amend Maryland law by making strangulation or suffocation as assault in the first degree. As a Registered Nurse and Director of Forensic Nursing at Mercy Medical Center for the City of Baltimore, my team and I see the aftermath of strangulation crimes every day, so much so that we are now known as not only the City's designation Forensic Nursing Program, but as the Strangulation Center. We also know that most injuries caused by manual strangulation are not even visible to police, potentially yielding fewer arrests and compromising what we feel are staggering statistics! Mercy has been involved in numerous research studies that include utilizing Alternate Light Source to detect injuries not visualized by the naked eye. ¹ Additionally, we see a large number of patient who are victims of human trafficking and they report frequent accounts of strangulation. As our victim numbers climb – so do the statistics of crimes escalating into strangulation crimes, a deadly statistic for Maryland.

I also serve on the Medical Sub-Committee for the national Strangulation Institute on Strangulation Prevention program which receives federal funding by the Office on Violence Against Women. Being connected nationally on the subject of strangulation has enlightened us that 47 of 50 states already have state laws strengthening penalties for strangulation. I am saddened to see that Maryland is NOT one of these states. I have also had the opportunity to testify before the Maryland Senate regarding other attempts to introduce strangulation legislation, which did not result in a positive outcome.

I thank you for introducing this crucial legislation for the state of Maryland. Amending Maryland law to make strangulation and suffocation a first degree assault can literally save the lives of Maryland citizens and protect the safety of the lives of thousands of domestic violence victims and their families.

Sincerely,

Debra S. Holbrook MSN, RN, SANE A, FNE A/P, DF-AFN, FAAN
Manager Forensic Nursing
Mercy Medical Center
Baltimore City, Maryland

¹Holbrook D, Jackson MC. (2013) "Use of Alternative Light Source to Assess Strangulation Victims." *Journal Forensic Nursing*, 9 (3), July - September.

Mercy Medical Center Forensic Nurse Examiner Program
301 St. Paul Place ~ Baltimore, MD 21202 ~ 401.332.9494
WWW.bmoresafemercy.org