

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

January 20, 2020

Dear Senator Lee and Delegates Pippy and Atterbeary,

Every day in Maryland, someone is strangled. This act of violence occurs mainly in abusive relationships across all racial and socioeconomic lines. Strangulation is serious and life threatening. This one act can lead to the victim's death in as little as three minutes. A victim of strangulation is also at risk for long-term health complications including death from stroke or carotid artery dissection due to the underlying damage caused by the assault. The psychological destruction and damage from lack of oxygen to the brain alone is immeasurable. Abusers use strangulation as a means to show control over their partners and to show how easily they could kill them.

As forensic nurses working in Montgomery County, we can attest that strangulation is a clear public health problem. We care for victims of nonfatal strangulation on a terrifyingly regular basis. By providing expert medical care and documentation of their experience, we are also educating on the dangers that they are facing. They are scared and feel powerless. The same partner has strangled many of them multiple times. We sit across from these patients and explain to them that this act is statistically often "the last warning shot". This one violent act makes them 750 times more likely to be murdered by their partner within a year. During this time, safety is paramount. It is vital that Maryland's laws reflect the seriousness and dangerousness of this act of violence. The current statute has failed to be sufficient at bringing justice for these victims. Maryland is one of only three states without any explicit laws making strangulation a felony offense.

By implementing tougher laws against strangulation within the state of Maryland, a clear message will be sent to perpetrators that this act is serious and simply not acceptable. Police and prosecutors will in turn be able to put tougher charges on assailants, keeping them behind bars longer. This helps ensure the safety of victims, giving them peace of mind and helping them to heal from the trauma that they have endured. Victims' experiences will finally be validated under the law. With more offenders behind bars, the cycle of violence will finally be broken.

Thank you to those championing this much-needed amendment for the residents of the State of Maryland. We implore all elected officials to think outside party lines and pass this important proposal for the health and safety of Maryland residents and their families.

Sincerely,

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Dr. Jessica Volz, DNP CRNP FNE-A/P FNP-BC SANE-A SANE-P NE-BC  
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And the Forensic Nurses of the Shady Grove Medical Center Forensic Medical Unit

