



House of Ruth Maryland

Marjorie Cook Foundation

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 233

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The House of Ruth Maryland is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House Bill 233 prohibits a person from committing an assault by suffocating or strangling another and categorizes the assault as a first degree assault. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to report favorably on House Bill 233.**

Physically abused women who experience strangulation are at a higher risk for increasingly severe, ongoing intimate partner violence.¹ Dr. Jacqueline Campbell, a nationally recognized researcher at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, conducted a 2003 study of femicide. After comparing groups of battered women, Dr. Campbell found that women who had suffered an incident of strangulation by an intimate partner were five times more likely to be murdered by that partner, compared to battered women who were not strangled. Incidents of strangulation are now included as a significant risk factor in the Domestic Violence Lethality Assessment, which is used to assess a victim's likelihood of future fatality by an intimate partner.

Although strangulation is one of the most highly lethal forms of domestic violence, it is still overlooked as a serious threat because the damage it causes may not be visible to the naked eye. Even when strangulation lasts for only a few seconds, the effects of compressing the carotid arteries and veins (the main blood vessels supplying the brain), blocking the airway to the lungs, and compressing the larynx and thyroid gland can be devastating and include potentially permanent disorders.²

¹Strangulation is produced by a constant application of pressure to the neck. Depending on the method of pressure application, strangulation can be described as one of four types: (1) hanging; (2) ligature strangulation; (3) manual strangulation; (4) postural strangulation where the neck is placed over an object and the weight of the body applies pressure to the neck. Strangulation may or may not result in death. Wilbur, Lee; Higley, Michelle; Hatfield, Jason; Surprenant, Zita; Taliaferro Ellen; Smith, Donald; Paolo, Anthony (2001), Violence: Recognition, Management, and Prevention, Survey Results of Women Who Have Been Strangled While in An Abusive Relationship, The Journal of Emergency Medicine, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 297-302.

² Diana Cheng, M.D., Medical Director, Women's Health Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

After reviewing several cases involving strangulation in 2008, the Baltimore City Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team recommended enacting legislation to create a felony statute prohibiting acts of strangulation. The purpose of such legislation is to make it clear that strangulation, because of its potentially lethal nature, is worthy of felony-level prosecution.

The House of Ruth urges the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 233.