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MAJORITY WHIP

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on  
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

**SB 429 – SPONSOR - Favorable – Stalking – Enhanced Penalties**

SB429 targets repeat and unrelenting stalkers with enhanced penalties. Usually increasing penalties doesn't dissuade crime, and the crime of stalking doesn't have as many convictions as we may think are warranted, but with a combination of tools from legislation before this committee this session, we can change the dynamics and fight the growing threat of stalking with a combination of tactics. This is the blunt force object. Stalkers may need to know the penalties are severe if you ignore our laws.

Presently, a conviction of stalking is a misdemeanor. There is no enhanced penalty for repeated convictions of stalking, yet this is frequently a crime of repetition. Most states have some form of enhanced penalties for this type of behavior.

According to the CDC, stalking affects 1 in 6 women and 1 in 17 men. Approximately 74% of the victims received threats of physical harm and the victims are often the youngest adults- college aged. An unbelievable 11% of stalking victims have been stalked for over 5 years. Two thirds of stalkers pursue their victims at least once a week and one third have stalked before. Stalkers who have been intimately involved with their victim are most likely to approach, threaten, or harm their victims.

These numbers are scary, but stalking is much more frightening than it may sound. Imagine being a victim and knowing that your stalker could, at most, receive a misdemeanor charge. Picture the stalker relentlessly terrorizing you, physically, emotionally and digitally. Similar to strangulation, stalking has a very high correlation with homicide. Victims of domestic violence are especially likely to have had been victims of stalking before an eventual homicide, the coalition and causation are clear. There is a failure to protect victims of stalking across the country and globe. The change was triggered with new technologies, and failure to train police

on that type of abuse, combined with an abject failure to adequately punish offenders and empower victims. Over three quarters of female homicide victims were stalked by the person who killed them. These are murders we can prevent if we protect the stalking victims, and lock up the stalkers, especially those who ignore our justice system.

This bill serves as an intervention and delay between stalker and victim and a potentially deadly outcome. We have increased the sentence for repeated conviction of stalking or stalking while under a protective order to a felony with maximum of ten years, a \$10,000 fine, or both.

SB 429 works in conjunction with my two party consent bill. Because convictions for stalking are far too infrequent relevant to the frequency of the offense. We must not bind victim's hands by not being able to record their stalkers, as we do in currently, because equally important to enhanced penalties is the fear of being caught. This session, we will have the ability to deter crime, train police training, and update our laws based on technology as well as common criminal practices. All combined, we can further recognize, documents and intervene in stalking, therefore preventing some homicides, and serious injuries, as well as the serious emotional distress caused through stalking. We must put fear into the hearts of the abusers that they will be investigated, prosecuted and sentenced to the appropriate terms relative to the harm they cause.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable vote on SB 429.