

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

2 East

Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB0017 Child Custody – Cases Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence – Training for Judges

On 9/1/2017, I was attacked by my ex-husband in our marital home. He was secretly recording an argument, in which he was lying about his actions, laughing at me for reacting to the lies. I saw his phone on the nightstand recording. I walked over to take the phone and he chased me through our home, violently grabbing the back of my right foot and slamming me down, pulling my leg as hard as he could, demanding I give him back the phone. I felt ripping and tearing sensations in my right hamstring, dry heaving and screaming from the pain. It was all recorded; I have the video. Most importantly, our 2 year old daughter witnessed this and has asked me about it many years later. I did not seek medical care nor file any charges, due to fear and financial dependence on his parents. The following day, I left with our daughter for a Labor Day celebration, my annual family gathering that he refused to go to. The patterns of these behaviors always surrounded holidays, birthdays, special events or gatherings. There were many instances prior to this, but I am only comfortable sharing the ones I have proof of, as this man is still harassing me and using the children and courts to continue the abuse. In January 2021, I decided it was time to receive closure from this incident and filed charges. They were immediately dismissed, per the statute of limitations of 1 year and 1 day in the state of Maryland. I'm baffled that abuse has a timeline and gets ignored this easily. One month later, my father-in-law was following me after an exchange. I filed a protective order and it was denied.

On 2/27/2018, he held a gun up to his head and threatened me saying "I'm going to blow my brains out right in front of you." This was in response to me being discharged from pain management, as he had been stealing my medications for many years, in addition to having his own. Upon asking, he agreed to lock his gun up in the safe and gave me the key. During this time, he had a child-like tantrum where he blamed me for our pedestrian vs. car accident and screamed "that's why you pushed me in front of the car!" He also threatened to leave and take our daughter. This conversation is also recorded and our daughter was present. Not long after this incident, I approached his parents regarding his addiction and asked for help. His father said to me, "I'll have your ass thrown in jail for feeding the shit to him." Blaming me for the addiction and threatening me. Later on, those words become a reality. As of today, I currently have two false assault charges against me from his sister and mother.

I became pregnant with our second daughter. This change progressively worsened current issues in the marriage. The day after Thanksgiving, 11/23/2018, we were on the way home from a friend's house playing music together. He had mixed his controlled prescriptions with alcohol and cannabis; refusing to let me drive. He was swerving and driving erratically, so I told him to stop the car and switch seats. While I was driving home, he started an argument about me talking with another man. He got very angry, banging his fists on the passenger airbag causing it to partially deploy. Suddenly, he grabbed the steering wheel and attempted to run us off the road. I used all the strength I had in me with my left thigh and both hands, to control the wheel; slamming the brakes abruptly. It left a huge red skid mark on my thigh. I threw his wallet out the window and told him to have his Mom come pick him up. Sadly, I turned the car around

and got him because it was cold outside. Every time I get into my car, I am reminded of this horrific memory. I will be so relieved when I am able to get a new car.

2/10/2019, the morning after an argument where he took our daughter with him to his parents and called the cops, he showed up at the door. After I stated, "she can stay and you can go," I reached out my arms for her, she reached back for me, but he instantly became full of rage and pushed me down while he was holding her. I was 13 weeks pregnant. He ran back to his parents' house and called the cops on me again. They showed up while I was in the shower, banging loudly on the bathroom door. The cops refused to let me get dressed, after asking them to leave my bedroom; handcuffing me in my home while wearing a bathrobe and boots. I did not know why I was being treated this way, after he pushed me down to the floor. It was humiliating. He had me emergency petitioned to the ER, where I was released within an hour. I filed a protective order, per Officer Hodel's suggestion at the hospital. When I got to the commissioner's office, the clerk informed me that my ex-husband had already been there this morning and decided to retract his order. I proceeded with mine anyway. Then, he filed one the next day. On 2/11/2019 I received a call from the officer kindly asking when I could be served because he didn't want to come to my employer on the first day of my new job. The next day, Judge Price ordered me out of the marital home for one week, at 13 weeks pregnant, leaving our daughter in the care of her abusive father. My ex-husband lied under oath, claiming I was "histrionic" and his lawyer suggested we both participate in marital counseling and individual therapy. The final protective order hearing was 2/19/2019. When I returned home afterwards, he said "I can't live without you." This resulted in me losing my job at the local bank, a place he knew I always wanted to work. The first day of the new job was 2/11/2019, the day after he pushed me down. Again, a behavioral pattern connected to any events, me making money or being away from the home.

On 6/2/2019, our daughter found a morphine pill on the bedroom floor. After consulting with him, he denied it was his. He was the only one with a prescription for this controlled substance at that time. He proceeded to blame this on me and my family. I have it all on video. This was not the first time controlled prescription pills were carelessly left lying around, as he was on 6 of them. It was that moment I knew I had to somehow escape from this nightmare, at 7 months pregnant. After our first marital therapy session with Dr. Peterson, he brought his parents, where they told him it was best to get a divorce. We separated on 7/18/2019. One week later, I filed for child support, as I would have no income after giving birth. I gave birth to our second daughter on August 27. I filed for divorce 10 days later. After we made a verbal agreement for custody, he kept our oldest daughter past the agreed time on 10/6/2019. I walked down to his parents to find the gates were locked. In all of the 5 years I lived there, they never locked the gates to their yard. I knocked on his Grandma's door. I entered after hearing "Come in!" I spoke with his sister and grandmother. They told me that my daughter was not there. A few days later, I received a criminal summons, as I stood in my front yard breastfeeding our new baby. My epileptic sister-in-law filed false assault charges against me for a verbal conversation. She didn't even write the report herself, it was in her Dad's handwriting. With the help of many friends and family, I safely left the martial home on 10/8/2019.

Fast forward, after a long awaited divorced delayed by Covid and a lawyer ignoring my evidence for custody; I am facing a second assault charge from his Mother. Again, for a verbal conversation which occurred in the Allegany County Detention Center parking lot, where we exchange the children. I am pursuing nursing school and currently working in the human service field. I will not be accepted into the program with these charges on my record. They know I want to become a nurse, as this will be my second attempt at nursing school. I have suffered tremendous mental health damages, in which I seek treatment weekly. Recently, my physical health is showing thyroid issues due to the stress of sharing 50/50 custody with my abuser, an addict and social worker who practices psychotherapy. I appreciate your time and attention to my testimony. I am in high favor of this bill. My oldest daughter witnessed domestic violence on multiple occasions in our home. She and I are currently in therapy. My ex-husband is dependent on controlled substances and mixing them with alcohol. He was still awarded 50/50 joint legal custody without any questioning or

investigation. I live in fear every day that my children leave to go with him. Anything can happen behind closed doors. I am a survivor, a protective parent who deserves peace; not only for myself, but most importantly for my innocent children. Something must be done to protect countless other adults and children from the unsafe conditions caused by addiction, untreated mental illness and domestic violence. Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent crisis.

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