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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 110

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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 110 would alter the criminal penalties for stalking under certain circumstances. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 110.**

Under current law, any conviction of stalking is a misdemeanor. House Bill 110 would make it a felony if a defendant is convicted of stalking when the victim had an interim, temporary or final protective order against the defendant at the time of the stalking incident or when the defendant had previously been convicted of stalking. This change to the statute will provide additional protections to victims of intimate partner violence whose abusers have subjected them to multiple incidents of stalking and/or when the victims have sought protection through the protective order process. Stalking places victims in extreme fear for their safety, as the behaviors which constitute stalking leave victims constantly wondering and afraid of when their abusers will next appear, whether they will find out where the victim lives, or whether the abuser will attack again. This is even more so for victims who are subjected to multiple acts of stalking. Raising the penalty for multiple acts of stalking or for stalking when a protective order is in place will increase accountability for abusers and hopefully serve to protect victims from repeated incidents of this terrifying form of abuse.

The House of Ruth urges a favorable report on House Bill 110.