



VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

January 27, 2022

The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Room 101, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support – HB148 - Criminal Law - Stalking - Definition

Dear Chairman Clippinger:

This letter, written on behalf of the Montgomery County Victim Services Advisory Board (VSAB), serves to support House Bill 148, which will alter the definition of stalking to include conduct which occurs in person, through electronic communication, or through the use of a device that can pinpoint or track the location of another without the person's knowledge or consent.

The Montgomery County Victim Services Advisory Board advises the County Council and County Executive on assisting the needs of victims of a broad range of violent crimes, including rape, domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking. The number and severity of sexual assault and domestic violence cases referred to the Montgomery County HHS Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program and the Abused Persons Program has continued to increase substantially during the pandemic, with more than 1800 requests for help in FY21 and 500 requests already received during the first quarter of FY 22. Victim cases have involved more reports of strangulations as victims – and abusers - have been forced to remain at home during the day because of the pandemic. More than 2,500 domestic violence protective order petitions were filed in Montgomery County District Court in 2021

With the constant evolution of cyber technology and phone applications, laws must change to reflect the advancement in these technologies. Strangers or known abusers may use tracking devices to target and stalk victims and monitor their locations. These tracking devices can be easily installed by anyone with access to a persons' cell phone. There are various "phone finder" apps that allow an individual, or anyone who knows that individuals Apple or Google ID and password, to track the phone while there are also bad actors who may access this information without the use of passwords. Many apps are designed to share a phone's location with friends and family members. Though there are many advantages to using applications to track lost phones, there are also many potential problems. The nefarious use of tracking devices may impact personal safety, leading to tracking, stalking, harassment, abuse, domestic violence, robbery, and sex trafficking. All individuals should have appropriate knowledge or consent when allowing another to use a device or application to pinpoint their location.

VSAB asks the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 148.

Sincerely,

Neda Bolourian
VSAB Members

Department of Health and Human Services