



Marjorie Cook Foundation

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 148

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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 148 would expand the definition of stalking to include electronic communication and tracking a person without their consent. **We strongly urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 148.**

The original stalking statute was passed at a time before the existence of electronic methods of communication and tracking a person. As such, the stalking statute in its current form only addresses physical forms of following a victim. Nowadays, most stalking is committed using electronic means of communication or tracking, instead of physically pursuing a victim. Common examples of stalking using electronic means include, but are by no means limited to: hiding a GPS tracker in a victim's car; turning on the victim's phone location application and using it to track the victim's whereabouts; putting a camera or listening device in a child's toy in order to hear/watch what happens at the victim's home; and, installing spyware on a victim's computer.

Victims who are subjected to these forms of electronic stalking live in almost-constant fear. They never know when, where or how an abuser might conceal a tracking or listening device and use it to follow, track or spy on their daily activities. Victims who move to a secure location for safety purposes or who change their routines in order to avoid their abusers are left to wonder if their new location is truly safe or if their abusers will find out by using a variety of technologies to locate them.

Under the proposed change in the law, such actions could be considered stalking if the victim can prove that the perpetrator intended to cause or knew or reasonably should have known that the conduct would place the victim in fear of harm or cause serious emotional distress. This would bring the law in line with the forms of stalking that are mostly widely used today.

The House of Ruth urges a favorable report on House Bill 148.