

Fifty-six years ago, my mother and her family – Lebanese-Jews – fled Beirut with nothing but the clothes on their backs and one small bag per person. They escaped to the United States in search of a better life, initially landing in Queens, New York, and eventually settled in Bergen County, New Jersey. Both New York and New Jersey welcomed them with open arms and supported them in pursuing a safe and stable new life for themselves. Today, approximately only twenty-seven Jews remain in the country of Lebanon, and they all remain in hiding, as it remains unsafe to be Jewish in Lebanon. I never imagined, fifty-six years later, right here in Maryland, that I too would find myself hurriedly packing a bag, fleeing my home with nothing but the clothes on my back and one small TSA-approved carry-on bag, and boarding an aircraft bound for Florida, because I too feared for my safety.

That won't happen to me, I said. I'm not of that race, ethnicity, or nationality, and so I did not speak out.

That won't happen to me, I said. I'm not of that religion or sexual orientation, and so I did not speak out.

That won't happen to me, I said. I don't have that disability, and so I did not speak out.

That won't happen to me, I said. I'm not part of that socioeconomic status, nor part of that income bracket, and so I did not speak out.

That won't happen to me, I said, until it was physically in my face, had me backed into a corner, and was spewing utter vitriol at me.

That won't happen to me, I said, he'd never lay a hand on me, until one day I found myself injured and in pain from the aggression.

That won't happen to me, I said, until nine months ago, when I found myself on the phone with a domestic violence hotline.

In 2022, a requirement was placed on the Federal Bureau of Investigation to notify local law enforcement when a prohibited person attempts to legally purchase a firearm and fails the background check. Maryland conducts some of its own background checks, however, the federal requirement does not apply to Maryland State Police. Though this notification process is helpful for law enforcement to remain "in the loop," it fails to help victims of domestic abuse be aware of the potential intentions of their abuser. Senate Bill 753/House Bill 869 – Public Safety – Firearm Background Checks, Victim Notification, and the Maryland State Police Gun Center, introduced by Senator Shelly Hettleman and Delegate Sandy Bartlett, would require an individual – most likely State Police and/or regulated firearm dealers who conduct background checks – to notify the State Police Gun Center of any background check denials. The State Police Gun Center would then notify local law enforcement within twenty-four hours, and that agency would henceforth be responsible for notifying any victim of domestic violence of the background check denial, if it is based on a prohibited person pursuant to an order of protection or violation of a protective order. This way, victims can remain informed of their abuser's potential intentions, and take necessary precautions to protect themselves and/or their own families.

Senate Bill 753/House Bill 869 is a crucial legislative priority for Jewish agencies such as CHANA and the Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse, as people experiencing abuse turn to these agencies for support, guidance, and resources, and to better understand their options and rights. Six years ago, as I watched military law enforcement arrest my soon-to-be-ex-husband for improper registration and transportation of his personal gun, and watched him subsequently get bailed out by leadership with no consequences, I recall sitting at the Provost Marshall's office in sheer horror. How are victims to feel safe, when the threat of intimidation and violence still has the capacity to permeate their existence?

I did not speak up, and I did not speak out, and when domestic violence quietly whispered its way into my own home and wrapped what felt like an invisible chokehold around my neck, I felt hauntingly alone and isolated. So, today, I am speaking up and speaking out in asking you to please consider prioritizing this legislation. Domestic violence doesn't discriminate against race or ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, nationality,

socioeconomic status, or disability, nor does it always take the form of physical abuse. By allowing people to take back some control, we can empower victims, and together, we can stop this deadly cycle.