



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
US ARMY INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT COMMAND
OFFICE OF THE STAFF JUDGE ADVOCATE
4217 MORRISON STREET
FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND 20755-5030

January 30, 2024

TESTIMONY FOR HOUSE BILL 290

NOTE: This testimony is not intended as an official statement on behalf of the United States Army, the Department of Defense, or the United State Government, but is limited to the personal opinions of the author.

I am writing in support of House Bill 290, entitled “Crimes – Interception of Wire, Oral, or Electronic Communications – Exception for Imminent Danger.” This bill will benefit victims of domestic violence, among others.

I have been advising and representing clients in civil protective order and family law proceedings for over 26 years. I am currently the Chief of Legal Assistance at Fort Meade and have been the main service provider for Fort Meade’s Domestic Violence Victim Representation Program, established in accordance with Section 548 of the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, which is the only such program in Maryland so far, amongst all of the Military legal offices.

Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to counsel and/or represent victims of domestic violence who were either fearful of or unsuccessful in obtaining a protective order or pursuing violations of a protective order due to lack of admissible evidence.

Evan Stark outlines the four elements a coercively controlling perpetrator uses to subjugate his partner and make the victim dependent, using a “strategic course of self-interested behavior designed to secure and expand gender-based privilege by establishing a regime of domination in personal life.” These four elements are (1) violence, (2) intimidation, (3) isolation, and (4) deprivation, exploitation, and regulation.¹ One of the key elements is isolation. Abusers rarely commit acts of violence against a victim with witnesses present. Often, the only evidence of a violent act is an audio recording that the victim as made or the eye-witness testimony of very young children. Under the current law, such recordings would not be admissible in court and young witnesses are legally incompetent to testify. These limitations create a great chilling effect on victims, who fear further reprisal if their efforts to pursue legal remedies fail.

During my 22-year tenure at Maryland Legal Aid, I represented hundreds of domestic violence victims in varying capacities. One particularly heart-wrenching case stands out. The client’s husband was one such coercively controlling perpetrator who isolated her by moving away from friends and family, refusing to allow her access to an individual means of transportation, and restricting her access to money, including money she earned. He routinely used intimidation – threatening to charge her with crimes, threatening to kill himself if she left him, threatening to “take her up into the mountains and cut her into little pieces and no one would care,” and threatening to “burn her family and friends down in their homes.” During one incident, when they were alone in their house with their 6-year-old son, her husband grabbed her by the throat and pushed her off of her feet up against a closet. She could not breathe and almost passed out. Their son was watching and attempted to escape and call the police. Her husband returned their son to his bed and eventually took him downstairs to watch TV. He continued to

¹ Stark, Evan, *Coercive Control. Violence Against Women: Current Theory and Practice in Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Exploitation*, pp. 17-33 (2013).

intermittently strangle and scream at her for 3 hours, after which he attempted to rape her. The episode ended with him crying and apologizing and promising not to do it again. He allowed her to leave the house to get some air, but retained her purse and their son. She called a domestic violence program and made plans to leave the next day with her son. She picked up her son from school the next day and entered a domestic violence shelter. She was able to obtain a protective order, but her husband was awarded visitation with their son and he used those opportunities to turn their son against her and continue to verbally threaten her. When her son's behavior became increasingly aggressive toward her and at school, and she could not get him to cooperate with therapy, she agreed to give her husband primary custody of their son. During the divorce and custody proceeding, our office engaged a domestic violence expert who was prepared to confirm, at trial, the client's status as a domestic violence victim. However, both the client and the expert concluded that if the court awarded the client full custody of their son and restricted access for her husband, there was a high likelihood that he would eventually kill her. The client therefore made the heart-breaking decision to leave her son in the primary care of his father.

I believe that had the current two-party wiretapping consent law been amended in accordance with House Bill 290 at that time, the results in this case would have been radically different. The client would have been able to use audio recordings of her husband's abusive behavior to pursue criminal charges against him for both his abusive actions and violations of the protective order. She would therefore have been able to retain custody of her son and obtain for him the counseling that he needed.

In my current position at Fort Meade, I continue to counsel clients who are fearful of taking action against their abusers due to lack of admissible audio recording evidence. The stakes are high for military abusers as they could face not only criminal charges under state law, but the loss of their career in the form of courts martial. They are therefore careful to ensure that any violent actions occur in isolation. I recently counseled a client against filing for a protective order because her only evidence would have been an inadmissible audio recording.

The power of an audio recording should not be underestimated. In a recent domestic violence related courts martial case at Fort Meade, the victim had audio recordings. Convictions were obtained for the charges that had supporting audio admitted into evidence, but not with respect to other charges.

House Bill 290 is a strong step in the right direction to help military victims of domestic violence present credible corroborating evidence against the offenders. I urge you to pass HB290 in an attempt to benefit all domestic violence victims, including those in military families.

Thank you.

/s/ Anita M. Bailey
Anita M. Bailey, Esq.
Chief, Legal Assistance
(301) 677-9086
anita.m.bailey6.civ@army.mil

Ms. Bailey has been representing clients in civil protective order proceedings and family law cases for over 26 years. She has been serving as a Legal Assistance Attorney at Fort Meade since 2021, and as the Chief of Legal Assistance since 2022. Prior to joining Fort Meade, she was the Chief of Maryland Legal Aid's Anne Arundel County office, where she practiced for 22 years. She is also a former State Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Human Services and ran a private practice. Ms. Bailey is licensed to practice law in Maryland and Washington, D.C. She is a member of the Anne Arundel County Bar Association and Maryland State Bar Association's Veteran's Affairs and Military Law Committee and is a graduate of Syracuse University and the University of Baltimore School of Law.

Fort Meade's The Legal Assistance Division provides free legal services to Active-Duty service-members, retirees and dependents in a wide variety of areas including tax assistance, domestic relations, estate planning, consumer law, military administrative appeals and the like. It has repeatedly been awarded the Army's Chief of Staff Award for Excellence in Legal Assistance.