

Good Afternoon Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis and all Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup> 2026 an important piece of legislation is before you in Committee. **HB 1586** will authorize a person to petition for a protective order against another person, who the petitioner alleges has engaged in controlling or coercive behavior toward the petitioner, and defining “coercive control” as a pattern of emotional or psychological manipulation, maltreatment, threat of force, or intimidation used to compel an individual to act.

A few years ago, I called the police as my abuser was at my home throwing my belongings out of my car, and all over my yard. He then stole my car from my driveway, in front of the police and my children. He stole my only mode of transportation to work and school. This left my two children and I stranded for over a week. At this time, my abuser had NOT lived in my home for two years, because of 2 prior protective orders, which had expired. Yet, he refused to release control over me in many ways. My car was still in his name at this time. He stole my car because there was a financial check that he wanted from me. When he wasn't getting his way, he stole my car.

As the police stood with me, they said there was nothing they could do because he wasn't under an active protective order anymore, and I probably couldn't get one because Coercive Control was not a reason for a protective order.

Experts say physical violence is just one of the ways that dominance is maintained in intimate-partner relationships, while coercive control — a known risk factor for abuse can escalate to assault or even murder.

My abuser assaulted me a few weeks later, trying to steal my car a 2nd time. This time he was under an active protective order and was arrested. The courts then extended my protective order for two more years.

His aggressive, intimidating behavior was a pattern. This wasn't normal marital issues. By allowing the courts to consider coercive control for a protective order will help so many people from undue harm.

I am here today to use my voice on behalf of many Coercive Control victims here in Maryland. I urge your favorable report on HB 1586 for domestic violence victims in Maryland.

If there are any amendments, you wish to see for this legislation please let us know.

Christa Whittington