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The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett  
Judiciary Committee  
100 Lowe House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

I request your favorable report on HB 1586. **HB 1586 – Protective Orders - Coercive Control** authorizes 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.

I have practiced family law for approximately sixteen (16) years and represent many domestic violence victims and survivors through CASA, Inc. Throughout my career, I have worked with numerous clients who have experienced coercive control that has significantly impacted their lives and left them living in constant fear. However, because coercive control alone is not currently recognized as a ground for a protective order, and because many of these victims have not experienced physical abuse, they are often unable to obtain the legal protection they need.

As a result, many victims remain trapped with their abusers, living under their complete control—financially, emotionally, and otherwise.

In 2023, I represented the former wife of Mr. Pedro Argote. My client was a victim of severe coercive control, yet she was unable to obtain a protective order against him because he had never physically assaulted her. He understood how to remain just within the limits of the law. My client had no money, no car, and no friends or family in the community. She was isolated along with her children and had little ability to safely leave the relationship.

As a result, she was forced to continue residing in the marital home with Mr. Argote until a judge presiding over the divorce matter recognized the coercive control he was exercising and ultimately awarded my client use and possession of the home, along with custody of the children.

That case ultimately ended in tragedy when the Honorable Judge Andrew Wilkinson was murdered by Mr. Argote. This devastating outcome underscores the very real and dangerous dynamics that coercive control can create. It is clear that my client needed protection from this monster, yet the law did not provide a mechanism to protect her at the time.

Coercive control is a powerful and dangerous form of abuse that can isolate victims, strip them of their independence, and leave them living in constant fear. Yet under current law, many victims cannot obtain protection until the abuse escalates into physical violence. By that point, the risks to victims, children, and the broader community may already be severe.

Victims of coercive control deserve access to meaningful legal protection before violence occurs. Recognizing coercive control within our protective order framework would provide courts with an important tool to protect victims and prevent future harm.

Sincerely,  
/s/ Erika Garrott Johnson, Esq.