



January 27, 2020

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
Room 101
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SUPPORT HB233

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary and Members of the House Judiciary Committee;

On behalf of **The Maryland Health Care Coalition Against Domestic Violence**, I am writing in support of **HB233**, Criminal Law – Assault in the First Degree – Suffocation or Strangulation, which will support victims of intimate partner violence.

Currently, many domestic violence assaults which involve suffocation and strangulation are charged as misdemeanor second degree assaults. There are often no injuries visible by eye, even after a severe strangulation. In fact, medical examiners have found fatal cases in which there are no external visible injuries. It is only in the autopsy that evidence of strangulation is found.

Despite the lack of visible injuries, decreasing or cutting off the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the brain (which occurs during strangulation when external pressure is placed on the neck) can cause brain cells to die. During strangulation, blood may continue to be pumped to the brain, but veins may be blocked so the blood has nowhere to go. Then, like a balloon with too much air, blood vessels start to burst. Structures of the neck are also vulnerable, and the strangulation could result in internal swelling or bleeding. The victim may look unharmed, but die or have a stroke or other life changing injuries that are discovered days, weeks or months later. Similar to an assault with a firearm, strangulation and suffocation are potentially deadly attacks.

The majority of acts of strangulation occur against women by their abusive partners. Researchers found 45% of attempted domestic violence homicide victims and 43% of actual domestic violence homicide victims had previously been strangled by their abusive partner who attempted or succeeded in killing them. Strangulation “is a significant predictor of future lethal violence” (Glass, Laughon, Campbell, Block, Hanson, Sharps, Taliaferro, 2008). This bill will treat suffocation and strangulation as the lethal force which we know they are.

For these reasons, **The Maryland Health Care Coalition Against Domestic Violence supports bill HB233.**

Sincerely,

Karalyn Mulligan

President, Maryland Health Care Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Audrey Bergin

Coordinator, Maryland Health Care Coalition Against Domestic Violence