

June 13, 2019

House Criminal Justice Committee
The Ohio Statehouse
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and honorable members of the House Criminal Justice Committee,

My name is Meredith Marie Turner and I reside in Shaker Heights, Ohio. I am a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., where I have the privilege of serving as a commissioner on the National Social Action Commission. Social Action is what we do!

Having strongly considered the lack of security and safety of women and children in my community, as well as the severe urgency of these crises nationwide, I strongly urge you to support House Bill 3 which defines and addresses factors associated with high-risk domestic violence and victimization and provides a comprehensive and necessary structural blueprint that will empower communities with tools to provide protections that will potentially save the lives of some of its most vulnerable citizens.

The success of this legislation is very important to me because I know and work with people that will be affected by this bill and I have lost people close to me as a result of domestic violence. In 1985, my maternal grandfather killed my grandmother sending my family's emotional and economic stability spiraling out of control for the next two decades, and just a few years ago I endured and survived choking and strangulation efforts in an intimate partner relationship while working for a high-level public official and finally I support this effort because last year, my childhood friend and line sister, Aisha M. Fraser was murdered by her ex-husband in an unremarkable act of brutality, immaturity and cowardice.

The current system is broken, leaving victims of domestic violence vulnerable to further violence, retaliation and even death. Domestic violence is an epidemic and people don't know what to do or where to turn when faced with such dilemmas. Survivors of domestic violence deserve the peace of mind of knowing that they and their children will have adequate protections when they come forward to report abuse, and finally, victims deserve to be heard, believed and have a viable and real opportunity to pursue justice while preserving their life.

For 16 years, Aisha Fraser was a teacher at Woodbury Elementary School. On Monday, November 19, 2018, her family, friends, colleagues and students gathered there to remember her with a candlelight vigil. Aisha and I attended Shaker Middle School and Shaker Heights High School together, graduating in the class of 1991. Aisha was a cheerleader and was in the orchestra. I was on the basketball and volleyball teams, I sang in the Acapella Choir and was a Raiderette in the marching band. We had big dreams and fantasized about how our lives would be when we grew up, what colleges

we would attend and what sorority we would join. We would even prophesize about who we would marry. On April 21, 2007, Aisha and I fulfilled an adolescent dream becoming members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., a Greek-lettered organization of college-educated women dedicated to public service. She loved her family and friends, her students, and she loved her sorority. Delta's legacy of social justice advocacy coupled with my personal experiences with domestic violence and loss have lead me to this moment of activism. On the night of Aisha's vigil, I rejoined with choir alumnae and present Shaker Heights High School Acapella Choir members to sing a song that we all learned and sang over the years as is our tradition: "The Lord Bless You". It was the saddest and darkest of nights. I couldn't stop crying and paralyzed by the terror of the moment, I couldn't get the words to leave the sanctuary of my throat. Never in our wildest imaginations would we have ever envisioned that a person with so many friends and close associations, be it from her childhood, church, school or college or any of the numerous charitable organizations which she claimed membership in would be gone from us so soon. We read about these instances on social media and hear about them in the news, but this was too close. This happened in our front yard-literally.

Aisha had so many lives to change and she was just getting started. She will never see her children grow-up or get married and raise children of their own. Her parents are devastated over the loss of their only child. Our sorority, her students, friends and many others are shattered inside because Aisha made all of us better. In the meantime, her murderer, a former Ohio general assemblyman and judge sits in prison plotting a strategy to save himself from consequence and accountability. He should have reason to believe in the possibility that he could get off on a technicality. It happened once before during his 2014 case when he brutalized Aisha in front of her children and barely served any time and faced hardly any consequences for such an egregious act against a woman he professed to protect, honor and love.

Aisha and I shared many wonderful experiences that I will always treasure, yet we also bonded over a shared experience of isolation, pain and abuse. I understood the dark places in which she dwelled, because I lived there too! As a result of this tragedy, I have started to find the courage to speak out and speak up about the dangers of domestic violence especially for public figures leading private lives. The stigma of victimization can be just as paralyzing as the abuse and the abuser.

In conclusion, I would like to ask again that you support H.B. 3 and I want to thank the House Criminal Justice Committee for your time, my representative, the Honorable Janine Boyd for her leadership and for lovingly engaging her constituents courageously and with valor and Rep. Sara Carruthers for joining in an effort that will make meaningful strides to protect all Ohioans from domestic violence. AISHA MILLICENT FRASER, #sayhername.

Submitted by
Meredith Turner
14205 Ashwood Road,
Shaker Heights, OH 44120