

**Amy Weber**  
**Proponent Testimony**  
**Ohio Senate Bill 207**  
**November 28, 2017**

Chairman Bacon, Vice Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you this morning in support of Senate Bill 2017. My name is Amy Weber. I'm here today because my sister-in-law, Monica Weber-Jeter, was murdered by her husband and it could have been prevented. I'm not a public speaker, lawyer, politician, or a professional domestic violence expert – but my life's purpose changed on October 8, 2014 when Monica was viciously stabbed by her husband. Monica died from her injuries on November 9, 2014 – she was 36 years old. She leaves behind 5 children and a large broken hearted family. Nothing will bring Monica back – but we hope sharing her story and enacting this important legislation will protect victims and save lives.

Our family refuses to allow Monica to become just another statistic. She was a daughter, sister, mother, aunt, cousin, friend, and co-worker. She grew up in Cincinnati surrounded by her large family—parents Rick and Vicky and siblings Rich, Tracy, Heather, twin sister Melanie, and Melissa. Monica and her high school sweetheart, Andre, married and had their first child in 1995. Their son, Baby Andre, died from SIDS the same year. They went on to have five more children, Jordan, Olivia, Noah, Christian, and Adin. Monica's children were her greatest joy.

In 1999 Monica went back to school and became a Licensed Medical Assistant. She worked for Oncology Hematology Care as a Clinical Coordinator for ten years. She was a hard working loyal employee. Her patients and co-workers adored her. Monica ALWAYS had a big bright smile on her face. She loved babies, music, singing, and spending time with her family and friends. She had strong faith and a selfless giving spirit. Monica was a devoted wife and mother. She was completely committed to keeping her family together.

Andre's possessive and verbally abusive behavior became evident a few years before the final attack. He began isolating her from the family, making unfounded accusations of infidelity, and calling her horrible names. Over time, the verbal abuse escalated to physical abuse. Dozens of domestic disturbance calls were made by Monica and the children in the months preceding her death. We may never know the extent and duration of the abuse because Monica, like many battered women, was secretive about the violence in her home.

On January 31, 2014, just 10 months prior to her murder, Monica was brutally strangled by her husband. The strangulation attack occurred while she was sleeping and their five young children were in the home. Their twelve year old daughter disrupted the attack and called 911 – probably saving Monica's life that night.

This is from Monica's affidavit in the strangulation case:

*I was sleeping when Andre came in my room and woke me up...I tried to walk out of my room and he blocked the door telling me I wasn't going anywhere... he put his arm around my neck in a choke hold and pushed me on the floor still choking me until I was dizzy and couldn't yell for help.*

She went on to say that Andre threatened to beat her and the children with a baseball bat.

Andre pled "no contest" and was found guilty on a misdemeanor domestic violence charge. He was sentenced to 11 days of a possible 180 days in jail and six months of probation. The protection order was lifted a month after the attack. Andre completed counseling and promised Monica he had changed. Sometime during the spring of 2014, he moved back into the family home. Soon after, the verbal and physical abuse resumed.

Sometime around 4:00 a.m. on October 8, 2014, while Monica was sleeping, Andre viciously beat her and stabbed her with a kitchen knife. Two of the boys were sleeping in the living room with her that morning. They both woke up and witnessed the attack. Once again, twelve year old Olivia called 911 and sat with Monica until emergency workers arrived. Andre fled the scene. He turned himself in to Springfield, Ohio police a few hours later.

Monica suffered more than 28 stab wounds – primarily to her abdomen. She lost massive amounts of blood and stopped breathing on the way to the trauma center. In a desperate attempt to save Monica, the trauma team performed the first emergency surgeries without anesthetic. Against all odds Monica survived the initial attack. She spent thirty-two days in critical condition at University of Cincinnati Hospital in the Surgical Intensive Care Unit.

Monica was alert, awake, and able to communicate by mouthing words throughout most of the thirty-two days she spent in the hospital. She refused pain medication and asked nurses to put her in an upright position when her children came to visit – so she could be present and awake. She fought so hard to survive but her injuries were too severe. She died peacefully on November 9, 2014 surrounded by her family.

When Monica was in the hospital we had so much hope that she would survive. We were all certain she would recover and share her story to help other victims. Instead - we are her voice. Clearly there are a lot of weaknesses and failures in Monica's tragic story. The January strangulation incident and how it was handled immediately stood out to me and other family members as the most egregious failure in Monica's case. We know NOW that strangulation is a known, well researched, and proven red flag for future domestic homicide. Andre got a slap on the wrist for committing a violent crime that frequently leads to murder - Monica was NOT protected and Andre was not held accountable. We KNOW that strangulation leads to homicide. Yet in Ohio we continue to treat it like a minor offense.

Felony strangulation legislation quickly became our first priority. We reached out to every expert and advocate for strangulation legislation we could find. I was overwhelmed with the immediate supportive response we received from domestic violence advocates, prosecutors, law enforcement, and medical professionals who have been working hard to get this legislation introduced for years –including some of the amazing people here today.

We started a petition on Change.org the month after Monica's death – and our family began the process of raising awareness through the petition, social media, and speaking and participating in DV events. We currently have over 120,000 signatures! The support from the community has been overwhelming.

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A felony strangulation statute is not the only answer – but it's an important first step. Escalating this crime to felony status will bring increased awareness and training for victims, law enforcement, courts, social workers, and medical professionals. Increased awareness and training will help prosecutors effectively build cases and get convictions, hold abusers accountable, and protect victims.

Looking back...

- If Monica and the people surrounding her had been more aware of the risks associated with strangulation – maybe we could have convinced her that she was in extreme danger.
- If Andre had been convicted of a felony and sentenced to a longer period of time in jail – maybe Monica would have had time to get stronger and develop a safe plan to get out of her abusive marriage.
- If Andre had been convicted of a felony – maybe he would have been in prison on October 8, 2014 and Monica would be alive today.

We are so grateful that Senator Kunze and the co-sponsors of this bill heard us and introduced Senate Bill 207. We hope that Monica's story will influence ALL lawmakers to act now. We hope and pray it doesn't take another tragedy to finally get this legislation passed.

I will spend the rest of my life fighting to make a difference in Monica's honor. Her death could have and should have been prevented. We all should have done a better job protecting her. The red flags were there but ignored. This legislation is not the only answer—but combined with education, training, and awareness, a felony strangulation statute will save lives.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share Monica's story.