

## **Testimony in Support of HB3**

**To address making changes to civil and criminal law regarding domestic violence, address State Highway Patrol arrest authority, name the act Aisha's Law, and to make an appropriation**

**Sponsors: Representative Boyd and Representative Carruthers**

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 3, legislation that would amend sections 109.744, 109.803, 2903.01, 2919.25, 2919.27, 2929.12, 2929.13, 2929.14, 2929.22, 2935.03, 2935.032, 2937.23 and 3113.31; to amend, for the purpose of adopting a new section number as indicated in parentheses, section 2935.033 (2935.034); and to enact new section 2935.033 and section 2919.261 of the Revised Code to make changes to civil and criminal law regarding domestic violence, to address State Highway Patrol arrest authority, to name the act Aisha's Law, and to make an appropriation.

When I told friends, I was coming to Columbus today to once again share my testimony, I was asked why I keep fighting for this. You see, I have been a part of this fight for the last five years. But I am confident this is the year. This is the time Ohio will catch up to the forty-eight other states that have enhanced strangulation laws. First off, I am stronger, and I am not as intimidated by sharing my story which is reaching all over the world. Secondly, the lethality of strangulation and asphyxia has been plastered all over media forums due to the death of George Floyd.

I have served Ohio in public safety for the last twenty years. I have spent the last sixteen years serving as a paramedic helping citizens in their most emergent moments. But, I am not here to speak as a professional or an expert. I am here to speak as a forty-seven-year-old left permanently disabled by near fatal strangulation. This is me in the summer of 2006, now if you are anything like the clinical side of me, you are looking at her and thinking, come on, that isn't that bad. But we now know the dangers of strangulation and that it often leaves no physical marks. She had no idea how close she was to dying that night. Let me take you back for a moment. Many details of the night are still fuzzy to me, but a few memories are etched in my brain forever. Let me share one of my vivid memories of my life. A man I had been dating and

who repeatedly said I love you, sat across my hip bones with his knees firmly pressing on my forearms as he said to me “I don’t know if I should kiss you or kill you”. He then placed both of his hands on my neck and squeezed. I vividly remember thinking that I was going to die. Memories of my child flashed through my head as I wondered who would raise him? Who would care for him? But by the grace of God, and what some of the best doctors in the country are calling a miracle, I am still here.

I have no expert testimony to offer you about the legalities or medical aspects of strangulation, there are plenty of others giving you that. What I do have to offer is a testimony of someone who has had their life severely impacted by the lack of medical knowledge and supporting laws regarding domestic violence and strangulation. After nearly losing my life in 2006, I began a downward spiral into a medical mess that would last the next fourteen years. In those fourteen years, I have inaccurately been diagnosed with multiple medical diagnoses. At one point, I was on fourteen different medications and doctors still could not figure out what was wrong or control my symptoms. In early 2019, due to all over these medical problems, I was told I would mostly likely never work, drive, or have a normal functioning life again. I was devastated and contemplated suicide.

In early 2017, I had gone to my primary care doctor and told her, “I must be having a midlife crisis, or I am going crazy. Something is wrong with me and I cannot take it anymore. I cannot handle sounds or lights and I feel like I have no control over my body or emotions”. She ordered an MRI along with blood tests and that was the first time that the diagnosis of brain injury entered my life. It was from there that I was sent to neuro specialists. For the next three years, neurologist after neurologist have poked, probed, and tested me over and over. They could not understand what was wrong with me. They believed that my brain injury could not be impacting me that greatly over a decade later. In early 2019, I had a MRI, EEG, BEAR test, along with multiple others.

In June of 2019, I traveled to the Functional Neurology Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota where I underwent a weeklong evasive evaluation and treatment. It was there that I discovered that my brain injury was the root of my problems and I finally felt like I had a chance at life again. I came back a “different person” as many people have told me. I continued to use the tools they taught me there to become better and better each day. I went out again in March of 2020 right as covid hit. It was then that all the pieces of the puzzle were finally together.

It was a year ago this month, all my doctors finally came to the same conclusion, I have a traumatic brain injury from that 2006 event that has been the root of all my medical mess. As I write this, I am now medicine free and all my previous medical diagnosis have been removed. I have one standing medical diagnosis which is this, traumatic brain injury secondary to hypoxia resulting from strangulation. I am still working on rebuilding neuro pathways and I spend two hours each day working my brain so I can appear as I do to people today, “just fine”.

Over the last several years of this excruciating journey, I have often wished he had just shot me when he had that gun to my head that night. The charges would have been clear, and his prosecution would have mostly likely been fair and just. Doctors would have easily seen my injuries and treated them accordingly. But that is not what happened to me. He used the silent weapon called strangulation that often leaves invisible injuries.

I do not completely know or understand what it takes to make a law or the ins and outs of it. I know you will hear and read several testimonies. I know that when it comes to opponent testimony someone will say as they have before, that my testimony while sad, does not support why strangulation should be a felony. My response to that is this, I listened to every minute of the expert testimony given in the Derek Chauvin murder trial about the impacts of strangulation and asphyxia, there is no reason to not be well informed. The testimonies are easily accessible on YouTube.

I can tell you with one hundred percent certainty, anyone who can stand before you and tell you that strangulation should not be a felony has never laid on a floor pinned down as someone sits across their hips, with a monster’s bare hands firmly wrapped around their throat, praying to God to save their life. That person has clearly never had their life and whether in the next few moments they live or die held in the hands of another human being.... Literally.

Thank you,

Paula Walters