

## **Testimony in Support of SB146**

### **To amend domestic violence law by means of firearms restrictions, penalty enhancements, and a prohibition against strangulation, and to make an appropriation**

**Sponsors: Senator Kunze, Senator Antonio**

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 146, legislation that would amend sections 2919.25, 2929.13, and 2929.14 of the Revised Code to expand the offense of domestic violence to also prohibit a person from knowingly impeding the normal breathing or circulation of the blood of a family or household member by applying pressure to the family or household member throat or neck or blocking the family or household members nose or mouth.

I have served Ohio in public safety for the last twenty years. I have spent the last fifteen years serving as a paramedic helping the citizens in their most emergent moments. This honor was taken from me in May of 2019 because of what I am getting ready to share.

I am writing this as a survivor of near fatal strangulation. In the summer of 2006, I almost lost my life to a man I lived with and whom also served Ohio in public safety. 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 two of my most vivid memories, first, I had a shotgun held to my head that night as he racked it. The other would change me and my life forever. That man sat across my hip bones with his knees 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 hands on my neck and squeezed. I vividly remember thinking that I was going to die. By God's grace, I am still here.

Let me take you forward thirteen years to today, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019. It has been hell for me for over the past decade. I have been lost in the medical system receiving wrong diagnosis after wrong diagnosis. I have had multiple hospital stays, medical testing, and specialist visits. I had to do bankruptcy due to the amount of medical bills that mounted. It has cost nearly \$200,000 thus far and I had no answers as to what was wrong.

Today, I received word that Senate Bill 146 was going to finally get a hearing. I was devastated because I won't be able to be there to speak this testimony. I am currently in Minnetonka, Minnesota attending Functional Neurology Rehab. Why does this matter in this testimony? I am finally after thirteen years getting treatment for my traumatic brain injury that I acquired that June day in 2006. I have finally been correctly diagnosed after thirteen years. Here is the disturbing part, I am here because of my own research and work. You see, doctors in Ohio have led me to believe I would just have to accept that there was not a lot that could be done to improve myself. I am forty-five years old and can hardly function outside of my home. I lost the woman I used to be, and I miss her horribly.

This clinic usually does a one-week intensive therapy for brain injury. I am here starting week two because the level of my injury was so extensive. Here is the exciting part, today, I was able to walk in a straight line without losing my balance. I can now turn my head right to left without getting dizzy and wanting to vomit. The doctors here have discovered that my brain injury has impacted all parts of my brain, all the way down to the brain stem itself. The basic functions of the brain were stolen from me that day in 2006. What did it cost the man who tried to kill me? He was charged with felony assault but given a plea deal of attempted aggravated menacing that cost him \$500.

Why should each of you care about my story? Well, let me share something with you. Eleven years later and two counties away, my abuser struck again. Memorial Day 2017, the same man who tried to kill me, shot up a campground while intoxicated. He held a sixteen-year-old girl who was a stranger at gunpoint. He threatened to blow her brains out while having a gun pointed at her head. An innocent family who was enjoying a family vacation had their lives changed forever. Do you take vacations with your family? Could you imagine having this happen to your child or grandchild while on vacation? I felt horrible when I first read about this tragedy but then I had to remind myself, I did my job in my case. I reported it to the police. I showed up at the Grand Jury. I didn't fail that young girl, the system did. Strangulation was not taken seriously then and there is still no current felony law in Ohio.

This revision of Ohio's domestic violence law is imperative. This revision does not just impact the people involved in a domestic violence situation but also men and women of Ohio like you who are going about their everyday lives that get caught up in bad conduct by men who strangle.

Paula D Walters  
Toledo, OH