

Testimony in Support of SB146

Expand offense of domestic violence re: impeding breathing/choking Sponsors: Senator Kunze, Senator Antonio

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Judiciary Committee, I approach you today with deep respect and appreciation for your service as part of this committee. I am here to speak in support of SB146, amending the Ohio Revised Code to expand the offense of domestic violence and 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's throat or neck or blocking the family or household member's nose or mouth..

I currently serve as a council representative in Barberton, Ohio and I have over 5 years' experience in victim advocacy. As a council representative, I have been a strong voice for domestic violence victims by fighting against legislation that was introduced in Barberton that would have added domestic violence to our nuisance law. During my time as an advocate, I have served over 2,000 individuals, including countless women who were strangled or suffocated during attacks from their intimate partners. The prevalence of strangulation and suffocation should absolutely not be underestimated.

I first learned about the seriousness of strangulation through training with the Ohio Attorney General's Office, which then helped me to best serve victims who experienced strangulation and suffocation. I have been able to help these victims through education on the seriousness and effects of strangulation and suffocation, as well as coordinating forensic medical care and evaluation within 72 hours of an assault.

Today, I would like to share one specific case that will always stand out in my time as an advocate. While working within the Akron Police Department, I was called to assist a victim who had been attacked by her husband. She has a black eye and had been strangled. She could barely talk because of internal damage from the abuser cutting off her airway. This couple had been married 20 years and there had been no violence for a very long time. I worked with the victim to develop a safety plan and she was able to end the relationship. The case was drawn out for months and months and while each time I saw the victim, her voice was a little better, we feared permanent damage.

Unfortunately, the system failed this woman. The abuser was charged with a misdemeanor domestic violence because this was his first domestic violence charge and the crime didn't "qualify" for a more serious charge. Well, as we all know if you have worked within the criminal justice field, a misdemeanor charge is often reduced or dismissed and can take months to resolve. So, the charge and consequence for this abuser's actions dissipated, sending a message that the behavior is acceptable not only to the abuser, but also to the victim and everyone affected by this incident.

This might be just one situation, but I assure you that I've seen many strangulation and suffocation cases, where the abusers are charged with misdemeanors, despite the seriousness and long-term health consequences of these specific actions. You have an opportunity to save lives and change the culture surrounding strangulation and suffocation through SB146. Therefore, I am asking you to please take this opportunity to make a difference and bring SB146 to a vote and vote yes to bring it out of committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify on this important issue.

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