

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.

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 have battled with alcohol usage, attempted suicide, and have difficulty maintaining steady employment with adequate benefits. I had to file 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. 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 could hardly function outside of my home. I lost the woman I used to be, and I missed her horribly.

Let me take you forward thirteen years to, June 17th, 2019. I was in Minnetonka, Minnesota attending Functional Neurology Rehab. Finally, after thirteen years, I was correctly diagnosed with Traumatic Brain Injury from that June 2006 incident. I was in the second week of my intensive weeklong therapy. Their website states that around 80% of their patients are recovered in the first week but I needed to stay a second. Here is the disturbing part, I ended up there because of my own research and work. My neurology team still believed I had multiple sclerosis. Here is the exciting part, today, I can 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 fear of walking up or down steps is gone. The doctors there discovered that my brain injury had 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. The Paula I had known was gone and in June I learned; she will never return. She has been forever changed and damaged. Although I have been released to return to work part time, I will never work as a full-time paramedic serving the people of Ohio again. I have been forced to change careers at 45. Trying to gain new

sustainable employment with the needed health benefits and a proper environment for my disability, all while having a moderate traumatic brain injury is nearly impossible and unobtainable.

But we are here to talk about the legal system. Well, I did my part. I filed a police report. I went to the hospital and got examined. I went in front of the Grand Jury. I showed up to court hearings. What did it cost the man who placed his hands around my throat and nearly kill me? He was charged with felony assault but given a plea deal of attempted aggravated menacing that cost him \$500 and a 1-year probation sentence. Just this year alone I have paid almost \$40,000 out of pocket for my recovery and I am looking at an easy \$25,000 more.

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 sons or daughters 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 didn't fail that young girl; the Ohio legal system did. Strangulation was not taken seriously then, and Ohio is only one of two states not taking it seriously now. You will not be able to go back and help that 16-year-old girl, but you can change the law to help those going forward.

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 those who strangle.

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