Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

Tuesday, November 28, 2017

Proponent Testimony

Senate Bill 207

Chairman Bacon, Vice-Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee: I represent ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women, a statewide domestic violence coalition, and I am submitting this testimony to support passage of Senate Bill 207.

Senate Bill 207 expands the offense of felonious assault to also include knowingly causing or attempting to cause physical harm to another person by means of strangulation or suffocation.

Domestic violence is about power and control. And one very common tactic of an abusive partner is strangulation, which is a particularly lethal form of interpersonal violence. Strangulation is seconds to unconsciousness and minutes to death. An abuser can use his hands or even a piece of clothing to strangle his or her victim. There’s no need to search for a weapon or load a gun. The challenge has been to educate health care professionals and law enforcement officers to be able to recognize the signs of strangulation and to take appropriate action to help the victim.

The act of strangulation is one of the best predictors of homicide for domestic violence victims. Often non-fatal strangulation occurs with some frequency prior to the act of homicide. And each time the victim survives, she or he is acutely aware that the next time could be fatal, or that the abuser will choose another method to snuff out the victim’s life. Whenever someone commits this act, it needs to be recognized that the abuser is well aware of his or her power over the victim and that there is greater danger that homicide will occur. Enacting Senate Bill 207 will help convey that strangulation is extremely serious and every effort should be made to help the victim escape from the control of the abuser before homicide occurs. Senate Bill 2007 will help establish that the abuser should be held accountable, that the punishment should fit the crime.

I would like to share with you one part of a letter sent to ACTION OHIO by a victim about her experiences.

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Letter from a Victim

Dear ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women:

Hello. My name is (Jane Doe). I am the mother of three beautiful children. We are the victims of domestic violence.

For the past three years I have been hurt by the hands of a loved one. Broken ribs, black eyes, head split open, not to mention the emotional abuse, the isolation, the denial of affection, necessities, and the feelings of safety.

If I were ever to speak up, I was hit, strangled and humiliated.

I was told by my abuser that if I ever pressed charges or he was sent to prison, I would die.

He told me several times after he strangled me that he wasn’t trying to kill me, that he was just trying to show me that he had the power to kill me.

Take a deep breath. Now imagine not being able to do that. Picture struggling for air and looking up to see a loved one. You think of your children and your life, you struggle more, making it worse. It is terrifying!

My husband has been arrested twice for domestic violence. Neither time did I press charges. I knew the ramifications could mean my life.

The domestic violence laws have changed, but not enough.

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This letter was dated November 26, 1999. Strangulation has probably always been a tactic of abusers through the years, long before 1999. It is time for Ohio law to reflect the lethality of strangulation and the likelihood that a homicide could be next – by strangulation or other means.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 207. I urge you all to support this bill.

Phyllis L Carlson-Riehm

ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women

PO Box 423, Worthington OH 43085-0423

[actionohio@wowway.biz](mailto:actionohio@wowway.biz) / 614 825-0551

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