**Testimony in Support of SB207**

**Felonious Assault Expansion to Include Strangulation or Suffocation**

**Sponsor Senator Stephanie Kunze**

Chairman Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 207, legislation that would amend the Ohio Revised Code to expand the offense of felonious assault to include knowingly causing or attempting to cause physical harm to another person by means of strangulation or suffocation.

I have been a registered nurse for 21 years and spent the last 6 years as a sexual assault nurse examiner. My job is to provide nursing care for those who have not only been sexually assaulted or raped but have been victims of strangulation and suffocation. On average, 35% of sexual assault cases involve strangulation. I testify on these cases in court and conduct education classes in my community on this very subject.

Non-fatal strangulation and suffocation present unique challenges and health risks. Patients commonly report pain with swallowing, voice changes, and headache, which are not symptoms we usually associate with life-threatening injuries or serious physical harm. But there are hidden dangers of strangulation and suffocation beneath the skin that may not perpetuate until days or months later, including brain injury, seizures, swelling of the airway, stroke, rupture of arteries or veins in the neck due to weakening, heart arrhythmias, swelling and fluid in the lungs, and organ failure. We know that patients who report urinating or defecating on themselves during the strangulation event were near death because they started to lose control of their bodily functions. They don’t always offer this information to law enforcement because they are embarrassed. These victims also experience emotional trauma from being strangled or suffocated that can last a lifetime. Patients often report to me that they thought they were going to die and thought about their children as their assailant strangled them.

This committee has received written testimony from an advanced practice nurse, spelling out the potential life-threatening injuries that can result from strangulation and suffocation as well as the likelihood that people who commit this crime will eventually kill. These attacks are violent. Strangulation victims lose consciousness after 6-10 seconds and die if the event lasts just several minutes. Victims who regain consciousness report feeling dazed and confused and their memory is often affected. By the time they get to an emergency room, there is usually little or no visible external injury, leading victims and sometimes health care providers to minimize the severity of the event.

This revision of Ohio’s domestic violence law is greatly needed. Offenders who commit this violent act, rendering victims helpless and sometimes near death, are often charged with a misdemeanor and receive minimal punishment. The message needs to be sent to law enforcement, court officials, health care providers, and victims that strangulation and suffocation are serious crimes worthy of serious punishment. Monica Jeter’s story, as well as the stories of countless victims who survive these attacks, are testaments to how vitally important it is to pass SB207. This amendment to the domestic violence law will save lives and send a clear message to offenders that they will not get away with the violent act of strangling or suffocating someone.