

Testimony in Support of HB3
To address high-risk domestic violence and victimization
Sponsors: Representative Boyd, Representative Carruthers

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 3, legislation that would amend sections 109.744, 109.803, 2903.01, 2919.25, 2919.27, 2929.12, 2929.13, 2929.14, 2929.22, 2935.032, 2937.23, and 3113.31; to amend, for the purpose of adopting a new section number as indicated in parentheses, section 2935.033 (2935.034); and to enact new section 2935.033 and section 2919.261 of the Revised Code; and to amend Section 221.10 of H.B. 166 of the 133rd General Assembly to add domestic violence circumstances to the offense of aggravated murder, to expand the offense of domestic violence to also prohibit strangulation of a family or household member, to require law enforcement officers to utilize a qualified lethality assessment screening tool to refer high risk victims to domestic violence resources, to create the Domestic Violence Prosecution Study Committee, to name this act Aisha's Law, and to make an appropriation.

I have served Ohio in public safety for the last twenty years. I have spent the last sixteen years serving as a paramedic helping citizens in their most emergent moments. This honor was taken from me early in 2017 because of what I am getting ready to share. I am writing this as a survivor of domestic violence and near fatal strangulation. In the summer of 2006, I almost lost my life to a man that I had been dating and lived with. 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. Memories of my child flashed through my head as I wondered who would raise him? Who would care for him? But by the grace of God, and what some of the best doctors in the country are now calling a miracle, I am still here.

I have no expert testimony to offer you about the legalities or medical aspects of strangulation, there are plenty of others giving you that. What I do have to offer is a testimony of someone who has had their life severely impacted by the lack of medical knowledge and supporting laws regarding domestic violence and strangulation. After nearly losing my life in 2006, I began a downward spiral into a medical mess that would last the next fourteen years. In those fourteen years, I have inaccurately been diagnosed with neurocardiogenic syncope, idiopathic anaphylaxis, postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, mastocytosis, fibromyalgia, depression, anxiety, complexed post-traumatic stress disorder, multiple sclerosis, traumatic brain injury along with several others. At one point, I was on fourteen different medications and doctors still could not figure out what was wrong or control my symptoms. In early 2019, due to all over these medical problems, I was told I would mostly likely never work, drive, or have a normal functioning life again. I was devastated and almost gave up on life.

In early 2017, I had gone to my primary care doctor and told her, "I must be having a midlife crisis, or I am going crazy. Something is wrong with me and I cannot take it anymore. I cannot handle sounds or lights and I feel like I have no control over my body or emotions". She ordered an MRI along with blood tests and that was the first time that the diagnosis of brain injury entered my life. It was from there that I was sent to neuro specialists. For the next three years, neurologist after neurologist have poked, probed, and tested me over and over. They could not understand what was wrong with me. They believed that my brain injury could not be impacting me that greatly over a decade later. In early 2019, I had a MRI, EEG, BEAR test, along with multiple others.

In June of 2019, I traveled to the Functional Neurology Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota where I underwent a weeklong evasive evaluation and treatment. It was there that I discovered that my brain injury was the root of my problems and I finally felt like I had a chance at life again. I came back a "different person" as many people have told me. I continued to use the tools they taught me there to become better and better each day. I went out again in March of this year right as covid hit. It was then that all the pieces of the puzzle were finally together.

Only a couple of months ago, all my doctors have finally come to the same conclusion, I truly have a traumatic brain injury that was the root of all my medical mess. As I write this, I am now medicine free and all my previous medical diagnosis have been removed. I have one standing medical diagnosis which is this, traumatic brain injury secondary to hypoxia resulting

from strangulation. I am still working on rebuilding neuro pathways and I spend two hours each day working my brain so I can appear as I do to people today, “just fine”.

Over the last two years, I have often wished he had just shot me that night. The charges would have been clear, and his prosecution would have mostly likely been fair and just. Doctors would have easily seen my injuries and treated them accordingly. But that is not what happened to me. He used the silent weapon called strangulation that leaves the invisible injuries.

I will be honest and say that I do not know exactly what all it takes to make a law or the in and outs of it. I know you will hear and read several testimonies. I know that someone will say as they have before, that my testimony while sad, does not support why strangulation should be a felony. My response to that is this, I can tell you with one hundred percent certainty, anyone who can stand before you and can tell you that strangulation should not be a felony has never laid on a floor pinned down as someone sits across their hips, with a monster’s bare hands firmly wrapped around their throat, praying to God to save their life. That person has clearly never had their life and whether they live or die at that very moment held in the bare hands of another human being.... Literally.

Thank you,

Paula Walters