

Dear Senator Linthicum,

I am writing to urge passage of SB 1562 in a form that will increase the penalty for strangulation from a misdemeanor to a felony and adds pressure to the chest as a crime. Our organization has worked extensively in Oregon in recent years to try to improve collaborative services for victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and human trafficking. We have also met many survivors of strangulation assault Oregon during our work who have faced life-threatening assaults only to have them treated as misdemeanors.

Men who strangle women are the most dangerous men in Oregon. If a woman is strangled one time by her partner, she is 750% more likely to later be killed by that same partner. But men who strangle women, are not just killing women. The predators are causing brain damage and long-term health consequences in thousands of women without any significant consequence for their behavior. Brain damage or other major internal injuries can begin to occur seconds into a strangulation assault.

Men who strangle women are also the cop killers of America. Our recent Internet research found that in 2017, 33 out of 44 officers killed in the line of duty in the U.S. were killed by men with a history of domestic violence in the public record – many of them with a strangulation assault history against women before they killed a police officer. Oregon has experienced the same reality. Oregon City Officer Robert Libke died in 2013, killed by a domestic violence/strangler, Lawrence Cambra. In fact, Cambra had strangled his partner a week before the murder of Officer Libke and again the morning that he killed Officer Libke. Men who strangle women are also the mass murderers of the United States. Devon Patrick Kelley in Sutherland Springs, Texas – the mass murderer in the largest killing in a church in modern American history – was a domestic violence strangler before he killed so many in a domestic violence related incident. The Air Force failed to treat domestic violence strangulation seriously which allowed Devon Patrick Kelley to kill 26 women, men, and children and seriously injure 20.

The majority of all strangulation cases in Oregon are currently treated as misdemeanors, like shoplifting. We urge you not to allow most domestic violence strangulation cases to continue to be misdemeanors. It will only be a matter of time until the next officer dies, shot by a strangler, a woman is shot to death after a prior strangulation assault, or a mass shooting occurs in Oregon where a strangler was not held accountable for a felony assault. The Oregon Legislature is currently the ONLY Legislature in the country that has considered a felony offense and then minimized the crime of strangulation. To date, we have passed felony strangulation laws in 46 states. Oregon stands alone in treating the offense as a misdemeanor in most cases. By allowing most of these cases to remain misdemeanors, you are incentivizing strangulation since aggressors can face prison for other kinds of assaults that produces cuts or bruises. We urge you to protect the thousands of women being strangled day in and day out in Oregon.

Making strangulation a felony in Oregon does not mean all offenders can or should go to prison but the crime should be treated as a serious felony. Judicial and prosecutorial discretion should decide if any particular perpetrator should actually receive prison time or not. And the truth is that stranglers currently populate your prisons for murder. Taxpayers are spending millions to lock them up for decades. If Oregon started using prison for only the most violent offenders – before they kill – you would find reductions in murders in your state over the years and find that short prison terms for these violent offenders is, in fact, a powerful deterrent.

We urge you to take a stand against strangulation. It will protect thousands of women each year in Oregon and help prevent homicides of women, children, and police officers.

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