

# The News & Observer (Raleigh, NC)

October 15, 2004 Friday

## Potential Safeguard for Women; N.C.'s New Domestic Violence Law Makes Strangulation a Felony

By Marie Brodie

[DURHAM] – Each year the Violence Policy Center ranks the states based on the number of women murdered by men. The center recently released the figures for 2002; North Carolina ranks ninth in the number of women murdered by men. In 2001, we were 17th.

It may seem we are becoming less aware and less caring about domestic violence in our state. That is not true. North Carolina this year passed the most comprehensive domestic violence legislation in the history of our state. House Bill 1354 was unanimously approved by both the House and the Senate and was signed by Gov. Mike Easley in July. Part of the legislation creates a felony strangulation law that goes into effect Dec. 1.

North Carolina is only the third state in the nation, after Missouri and Oregon, to have such a law. To see why, you don't have to look farther than stories from survivors of domestic violence.

Last year, The N&O, as part of a series about domestic violence, reported on the case of a woman whose boyfriend had strangled her to the point of unconsciousness. He was charged with misdemeanor assault on a female. The maximum sentence was 150 days in jail. (The man spent five months in jail, but none of that was for the strangulation).

Recently I have talked to four women who told me that their abusive partner had strangled them. Three have left their abusive partners. One is still with her boyfriend. All are in danger, because abusers do not stop their violence simply because women leave them.

Strangulation is a significant "lethality factor" in domestic violence cases. In 2002, the N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence started collecting information about homicides related to domestic violence in North Carolina. That year, out of 72 such homicides, six women were strangled to death by their intimate partners. In 2003, out of 72 domestic violence-related homicides, two women were strangled to death by their intimate partner. So far in 2004, out of 50 such homicides, three women have been strangled to death by their intimate partner.

The deaths of 11 women because of strangulation in this short period are far too many.

Where do we go from here? Survivors of strangulation need the assistance of trained professionals. The new law will include mandatory training for judges and court personnel on domestic violence. Yet we are missing some key players. Dispatchers, first responders, medical professionals and district attorneys are among the many professionals who need to be aware of the new law and of how to detect and prosecute felony strangulation cases.

Police and prosecutors should swiftly enforce this new law. Sadly, chances are that someone will strangle a loved one in early 2005. As soon as that happens, we need to see the new felony strangulation law put into effect.

The House Select Committee on Domestic Violence did great work on House Bill 1354 and we applaud them. But as long as our state is ninth in the number of women murdered by men, our work is far from over.

*(Marie Brodie is training coordinator for the N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The text of HB 1354 can be found at [ncleg.net](http://ncleg.net) and a summary is at [nccadv.org](http://nccadv.org).)*

Copyright © 2004 The News and Observer.