

HB'S 5054 - 5058

1-14-2020

Hi. My name is Ashton Steele and I am a 32 year old resident of Dexter where my chances of being a victim of a violent crime are a staggeringly low 1 in 1,490 people. Still, every day when I leave my house and come home I vigilantly watch for an attacker. Everyday and everywhere I go I vigilantly watch my back for an attack. This is because I am a survivor of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking - and unfortunately perpetrators that commit crimes of dominance and obsession like this don't easily forget their victims or leave them alone.

A lot has happened with both of my assailants in these past 8 years but the most pertinent fact is that they were able to find each other due to public records containing my name and my address. Since then my life has been filled with legal problems exorbitantly expensive to both me and the state of Michigan in trying to mitigate the impact.

I moved in January 2019 and bought a home in hopes of starting a new life. Within months of registering my new address I was again being stalked. It was actually very simple to be found due to public records. It didn't take long for this stalking to dangerously and embarrassingly spill over into my workplace. Consequently, my employer, the University of Michigan, has maintained an alternate address for me to be listed on my business cards and in online directories. Thankfully my office now feels like a safe place because the location confidentiality provides me with the solace I need.

I have tried to protect myself via the court and other outlets for many years. When all of that failed I tried contacting media outlets. This also failed.

Victims like me are easily accessible whether we seek public help or we try to hide. It is so easy to find victims. Meanwhile, the process is absolutely empowering and simple for perpetrators who want to find us. Protection is not only embarrassing but is a disempowering and exhausting process for survivors. It's easy to be beaten, raped, and stalked. It's also easy to find someone, follow them, and hurt them.

I really hope you all want to make it harder for that to happen. I reiterate, it's really hard to hide. It's hard to protect yourself. It costs time, money, energy, and resources that survivors just don't have to be safe. And I repeat - being dangerous is free.

After less than one year in my home, I became tired of having the same private investigator in the same car sitting in front of it every single day. I recently listed it for sale. I plan to move and have hope that he will not find me. And enrolling in this program would be one of the first things I would do. Not just to hide, but as another piece of evidence that he is stalking me. This bill is not simply fair. This bill is absolutely essential to make it possible for survivors of violence to protect themselves. This bill won't just help survivors and disempower perpetrators. This bill will serve as an avenue that reveals true assailants while providing alternate criteria to differentiate them from safe individuals. You may be asking how? Well, if someone has legally gone through the bureaucracy and trauma of concealing themselves - and has still been found -

this should alert us to the danger of the person that found them. It will also save a lot of money to counties paying to litigate these issues.

The fact that somebody who has done harm to somebody can find and retaliate against them so easily is the problem. Due to my situation – I am a mom in the miserable dilemma trying of to balance my need of being able to act quickly and defend my family with the terror of keeping a loaded gun in a house with a toddler.

Thank you to the bipartisan Senators who brought this forward. Please move this bill on to the house floor for a vote. There is no reason not to. Thank you listening to what I have to say. Have a nice day and I promise you have not heard the last from me.