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### **Burleson approves new ordinance to combat domestic violence**

*First of its kind ordinance in the nation that will impose a protocol on public safety in how they respond to cases of strangulation.*

Burleson City Council approved a unique ordinance at their Jan. 22 city council meeting that that will impose a protocol on public safety in how they respond to cases of strangulation, making it the first city in the United States to pass such an ordinance.

The purpose of this ordinance is to protect victims whose health, safety and welfare may be jeopardized through exposure to violence using strangulation.

"In 2017, the city had four homicides," stated Burleson Police Chief, Billy Cordell. "Two of those cases involved the victim being strangled to death."

Mayor Ken Shetter, who currently serves as President of One Safe Place, was a leading proponent of the ordinance.

"This ordinance is going to save lives," said Mayor Shetter. "I just want to reiterate it is common that a victim of strangulation will not have a bruise around their necks, but it is very common for victims of domestic violence who have been strangled to minimize that the strangulation has taken place. And even if they feel fine they don't realize there are permanent, even life-threatening, health implications that can result from this form of abuse."

The new ordinance will make it mandatory for emergency medical personnel to respond, along with police officers, when an act of strangulation is alleged or suspected. Emergency personnel will render aid to the victim and advise them of appropriate next steps to ensure their health and safety. Both police and emergency responders will be required to fully document the details of the assault which includes, the suspect(s) behavior, actions and any comments made during the act of strangulation and the victim's comments during the emergency response. This documentation provides detectives with additional evidence and witnesses to assist in prosecuting the assault as a violent act.

This ordinance came from months of research and discussions from a multiagency task force which includes members of the Burleson Police Department, Burleson Fire Department and their medical director, Medstar Ambulance Service, Johnson County District Attorney's Office, Johnson County Attorney, Tarrant County District Attorney's Office, the City of Burleson legal advisor, Burleson Public Safety Committee and members of One Safe Place Family Justice Center.

### **Why is this ordinance needed?**

Many police officers lack the specialized training to identify the signs and symptoms of

strangulation and often focus on visible, obvious injuries like stab wound or contusions. Often in fatal cases, there is no external evidence of injury from strangulation, yet because of underlying brain damage due to the lack of oxygen during a strangulation assault, the victim may have serious internal injuries and can die days later.

The lack of training has led to a minimization of this type of violence, exposing victims to potential serious short-term and long-term health consequences, permanent brain damage, and increased likelihood of death. Lacking the specific legislation and specialized training allows many near-fatal strangulation cases to be prosecuted as misdemeanor crimes.

Research has demonstrated the element of strangulation is an indicator of an escalation of violence and associated with increased risk of serious injury and death. Intimate partners who have a history of strangulation pose a greater risk to their victim and society at large.

“A victim of strangulation by their intimate partner is 700 percent more likely to become a victim of homicide by that partner,” said Mayor Shetter. “Abusers who will strangle their intimate partner are also more likely to commit violence outside of their homes and often that violence can be devastating to the community.”

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