

Forsyth County could gain domestic violence pilot program

BY CHANEL DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

A new program designed to combat domestic violence and give victims peace of mind could be introduced into Forsyth County, if approved by the N.C. Senate.

Allison's Law is a pilot program, attached to bill HB 740, to track those convicted of domestic violence with the use of a GPS bracelet.

The bill would allow a judge to determine if a defendant that the court finds has committed an act of domestic violence can be subject to electronic monitoring by means of a global positioning system tracking device or similar device as a form of relief.

Authorities and victims would be alerted when an offender is near the victim's home, school or work.

The program could begin as early as Jan. 1, 2016.

The bill passed the House chamber 119-0 on April 28, 2015, and is waiting to be heard in the Senate. A statewide bill was passed unanimously in the House in the 2013 session, however it failed to be heard in the Senate in the 2014 session.

"In 2013, the bill got out of the house but it did not get pass the Senate," so we decided to make it into a pilot program instead. That way, we could just test it locally first and prove the concept, before bringing it back a session from now," said House Rep. Ed Hanes Jr.

The North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, law enforcement and the Department of Public Safety have been working with legislatures, including Forsyth County's Reps. Donny Lambeth, Hanes, Evelyn Terry and Debra Conrad, and discussing some of the issues and practical considerations of the legislation.



Taylor

Hanes

Councilman James Taylor, chair of the city's Public Safety Committee, said that he welcomes the proposed pilot-program to the community.

"I commend the local delegation for calling for GPS monitoring to track the location of those who are convicted of domestic violence," Taylor said. "I feel that the proposed domestic violence pilot program is an excellent program that will address a pressing issue of domestic violence here in our community. The City of Winston-Salem has worked to hire additional public safety personnel to solve domestic violence-related crimes. However, more has to be done by all agencies to make a difference."

The bill is named after Allison Gaither, who was fatally stabbed in 2009 near her home in Ardmore by her estranged husband, Cory Gaither. At the time, Allison had just taken out a 50-B protective order against her husband. According to police, he still came to her home, stabbed her and then fled to Davidson County where he hung himself.

The bill will allow the N.C. Department of Safety to decide the overall cost, the device type, the monitoring regulations of the program and the requirements needed for the offender to participate in the program.

"The offender would have a bracelet on them at all times, while periodically throughout the day that bracelet would track where they are. If they came within a certain number of feet within the victim, the bracelet would go off and

alert the authorities," Hanes explained.

Taylor said that the program offers a sense of accountability for those who've been ordered to follow the guidelines of the protective order issued by a judge and a sense of safety for the victims involved.

"We have seen reoccurring domestic violence cases in our community that have turned deadly, because there was no real way to ensure that abusers were following court orders and staying away from their victims," the councilman said. "GPS monitoring will give us the ability to protect victims and to closely monitor convicted abusers. This is a step in the right direction to keep our community safe."

The Department of Public Safety will report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety on the effectiveness of the program by April 1, 2018. That report is expected to include any recommendations regarding the continuation, expansion, or elimination of the pilot program, as well as costs associated with implementing the program or any recommended legislation.

Hanes said that in other states that have similar programs, like Florida, the instances of offenders coming back and harming the victim has gone down drastically because they know they are being watched. He said that means the victims are able to get their lives back.

"The victims not only feel safer, they feel like they're constantly being watched and someone is out there working with them to protect them from a re-assault," Hanes said. "That's what it's all about. We want to focus on the victims, their families and making them feel safe."

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Reforming Baltimore police may need U.S. oversight

BY BEN NUCKOLS AND MICHAEL BIESECKER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BALTIMORE — Months before a young black man died of the broken neck he suffered during what Baltimore's top prosecutor called an illegal arrest, the city's mayor and police commissioner said the department needed reform and asked the U.S. Justice Department for help reviewing officer misconduct.

Now that Freddie Gray is buried, six officers are charged in his death and an uneasy calm has returned to the streets, critics are wondering whether city leaders are capable of implementing the change the city needs without the direct, intensive oversight that comes with a full-fledged civil rights investigation resulting in a federal consent decree.

Democratic Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake has already pushed back against this possibility, saying it would deprive Baltimore's leaders from having a say in fighting crime in one of the nation's most violent major cities, with more than 200 homicides a year.

"Nobody wants the Department of Justice to come and take over our city," she said last week.

U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch was in Baltimore on Tuesday to meet with Gray's family and faith leaders. Justice Department officials accompanying her included the head of the civil rights division, Vanita Gupta.

Baltimore's leaders should welcome federal oversight, because it's doubtful any police department can fix itself from within, said Erwin Chemerinsky, the dean of the University of California-Irvine School of Law. Consent decrees have been mostly effective since Congress responded to the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles by granting the Justice Department the power in 1994 to sue police departments for civil rights violations.

Los Angeles went through it, and proved that it works, said Chemerinsky, who has studied reform efforts there.

The Justice Department has negotiated settlements with 21 other police departments since then; Seattle and New Orleans are currently under consent decrees, and Cleveland's police department is negotiating one.

The Justice Department already announced a separate federal probe of Gray's death. And a broad civil rights investigation would not begin unless federal authorities conclude the ongoing voluntary review is insufficient.



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