

# Utah lawmakers kill bill which would punish people who don't call 911

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(KUTV) -Lawmakers in the Utah House of Representatives voted against a bill that would have made it a crime to not assist a person in danger by calling 9-1-1.

House Bill 125, Duty to Assist in an Emergency, would have required people who witness a person in danger, as in domestic violence, to call 9-1-1 and get help for the victim. The penalty for not doing so would have been a class b misdemeanor.

Rep. Merrill Nelson of Tooele was among several Republican lawmakers who expressed concern over possibly making a criminal out of someone who didn't call for help.

"We are saying you are a criminal if you do nothing, " he said of the bill.

Nelson said often, children witness domestic violence, but they shouldn't be expected to call 9-1-1 because reporting their own parents is difficult.

Marina Lowe, Counsel for the ACLU, said she had concerns about the bill too. The ACLU is a proponent of decriminalizing behavior and putting fewer people in jails.

This bill, she felt, would have done the opposite.

Lowe expressed regret that the ACLU went against legislation sponsored by Rep. Brian King of Salt Lake - someone with whom the ACLU usually sees eye-to-eye.

Advocates for victims of domestic violence were among the proponents of the bill saying it's time for the general public to get involved to stop a domestic violence, which killed 48 Utahns last year.

They said bystanders often, neighbors, know that a victim is being hurt by a spouse but fail to take action and get help for the victim.

Erin Jamison, Director of Public Policy for the YWCA in Utah, said she wasn't very surprised the bill was met with resistance on the house floor because of the concerns that the law could have been over-reaching.

Still, she said it was good to see a very public debate on an important issue.

"For so long we've really seen domestic violence and sexual violence victimization as personal, private, behind closed doors, "she said.

