

House Bill 359

Senate Sponsor Testimony

Representative Anne Gonzales

Good Afternoon Chairman LaRose, Ranking Member Thomas and Members of the Senate State and Local Government committee. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to speak to you in support of House Bill 359. My joint sponsor, Representative Duffey, already covered what the legislation would do for victims of these crimes, but I wanted to cover how this bill would impact the lives of those affected, particularly the connection with services and the absolute confidentiality of this program.

When traumatic incidents like domestic violence or rape occur, victims often don't know where to turn for help. Questions about housing, medical care, legal assistance and employment need to be addressed by qualified experts. The state and various organizations already have programs in place to address these needs for victims. By requiring applicants to utilize a victim's advocate, we ensure that those who wish to go in to hiding will have the resources available to them that are provided by these organizations.

In addition to the connection with services required by this bill, the address confidentiality program will provide maximum discretion for program participants. As our society becomes more and more connected each day with the internet, more of a person's information is available online. For instance in Summit County, with nothing more than a person's last name, you can find their address on the county's website. In Hamilton and Franklin Counties all you need is to search a publically available spreadsheet. In nearly every county in Ohio, every time some one moves, buys a car or files for divorce (common actions for a victim when they decide to leave their abuser), the information is available online. While this is a testament to Ohio's push for robust "sunshine laws," they may be useful as a tool for an abuser to locate their victim.

The ACP will provide victims complete confidentiality in the form of a PO Box at the Secretary of State's office. This address can be used on all governmental forms with all agencies. The only people who would know the true address of the victim would be the Secretary of State, those who the victim

provides the address to and law enforcement who have received a court order. If an abuser tries to find the victim's address they will only find the ACP number regardless of which system they use. No longer will our clerks of court, boards of elections or state licensing boards be used to find victims.

This bill is an important step for our state to take towards protecting victims after one of the most personal crimes that can occur. Thirty-six states have similar programs to what we propose here and, with its passage, Illinois and Michigan would be the only states in the Midwest without this program. This is a common sense initiative that is supported by the Secretary of State and victims advocates alike. Thank you Chairman and members of the committee for your consideration on this bill, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.