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HB 497 Proponent Testimony

May, 22nd 2017- that's the day my life changed. A few months earlier, my ex boyfriend told me his phone had been stolen, a phone that contained intimate photos we had taken during our relationship. I didn't think much of it at the time- "that could never happen to me, why would somebody want to post those on the internet?!"- To me, a 31 year old mother of two, the idea of "revenge porn" was so foreign to me, that is, until May 22nd. That was the day I received a Facebook message from an acquaintance that told me that private photos shared within the confines of a trusting relationship had been posted on the internet. My heart pounding, I clicked on the link she provided- after scrolling through dozens on photos on a strange message board that promotes posting "sluts by state", I discovered that the unthinkable had happened. As waves of panic and shame crashed over me, I did a quick google image search and discovered that my photos had been posted dozens of times. Thousands of people had seen the images, many had written horrible things about me and my body. They didn't see me as a person, only an object to be sexualized. I found the original post of the photo, and discovered that I knew the poster- he was an acquaintance, and upon confronting him, he fully admitted to stealing the phone and posting the photos. He apologized profusely, and promised to delete them, although the damage had already been done, and they were out there to haunt me forever.

I went to the police, with what i thought was rock solid evidence- a texted confession- and was shocked at the response I recieved. I was told that the only crime that had been committed was that he had stolen a cell phone, and because my ex hadn't filed a police report, there was nothing they could do. I was told that, to the state of Ohio, a cell phone had more rights than me, a human being.

I was outraged. I was hurt. I was depressed. I had nowhere to turn- I was afraid to tell anyone what had happened, for fear that the photo might be shared more. I was terrified of being in public- anytime someone stared at me too long, I immediately thought that they had seen my photos. I felt ashamed for sharing the photos with someone i had loved and trusted, and i was angry that there were no resources for this kind of attack.

Because that's what it is- an attack. An assault. A way of harming someone by exposing their body to the world without their permission.

I didn't want anyone else to feel that way. I started going through the websites used to share my photos, and reaching out to others who had been hurt this way. I found some amazing, strong, and inspiring women, who felt the same way I did, and wanted to see justice. And that's how the badass army was formed.

BADASS- Battling Against Demeaning and abusive selfie sharing- started out of necessity, as our way of fighting back against the practice. We all started notifying victims, and researching how to get photos down. We connected with anyone who we knew could help- IT support, coders, law enforcement, and lawyers- to find the best ways to help empower victims. Through trial and error, we discovered how to get photos down, and our group grew every day as more victims came to us for help and solidarity.

Currently, the BADASS Army is made up of over 600 people from all over the world who have experienced this form of abuse, and learned how to re empower themselves and become their own advocates for justice. Since we started in ohio, we have over 150 victims from this state. And that's only a portion of the people who have gone through this- There are still thousands of

pictures on the web of our fellow Ohioans. There is no law to protect them or guarantee them justice, which is something that needs to change.

We've learned a lot of facts when starting our group- like the fact that it's estimated that 1 in 25 americans find themselves victims of this kind of assault. Up to a quarter of the photos featured on websites dedicated to revenge porn are legally considered underage pornography. Although women make up 90% of the victims of image abuse, this is a prevalent problem within both the gay and trans communities as well. Many people are stalked, harassed, blackmailed and extorted due to image abuse. And this practice, which leads to so many other crimes, and contributes to so much harm, is perfectly legal in Ohio.

We Ohioans pride ourselves on our values- yet, when it comes to image abuse, we are woefully behind many other states. I'm grateful for representatives Rogers and representative Manning for introducing this bill, which will help us join the 38 states that currently have revenge porn laws. I'm thankful that they want to show America that in ohio, women are not objects. That they will see justice for what has been done to them.

I urge you all to vote for the criminalization of revenge porn and image abuse, and to show your female constituents that you want to protect them from having to experience what I, and these other brave women, and the thousands of silent victims across Ohio, have been through. Thank you.