

Testimony for Public Hearing

Senate Finance Subcommittee

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Faith Mission and CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence

Good morning Chairman Oelslager, VC Manning, and members of the Finance Committee. My name is Sue Villilo and I am the Executive Director of Faith Mission and CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence

CHOICES has been providing domestic violence services for 30 years. The hotline staff took 4,792 calls with an average call time of 9.58 minutes. There were 4,399 female callers, 179 males, 8 transgender, and 206 unknown callers. Our shelter services housed 701 individuals during calendar year 2016 and offered support and comfort to 356 adults and 345 children. Nine of the adults were men. Our relationship with the Columbus Police Department and several of the suburban communities around Franklin County has allowed CHOICES the opportunity to engage with women and men whose abuser has threatened to kill them. CHOICES received 1,716 high danger calls from the police last year. Seventy four percent of those callers spoke to a hotline worker. Five hundred and thirty eight callers scheduled to meet with one of the community advocates for safety planning, education and access to community resources.

A couple of weeks ago, the Finance Subcommittee on General Government and Agency Review heard testimony from Lillian Howard, the Clinical Supervisor at CHOICES. She was asking for support of the newly created Domestic Violence Program, line item 055602, that would allocate \$100,000 per FY to the Domestic Violence Program. The money would be administered through the Attorney Generals office and the funds would be used to provide services to victims of

domestic violence. Services include, but are not limited to: transitional services, victim advocacy and support, and education to prevent domestic violence.

While I appreciate the Senate's attempt at keeping this provision in tact, the language deletes the new line item and instead says that \$100,000 "MAY" be utilized from the Attorney General's Operating Expenses line item, 055321. I understand this is not an easy budget to ask for new funding, but numerous states offer direct line item support for domestic violence programs and Ohio has fallen behind in helping this vulnerable population get, and stay on, its feet.

Additionally, in line 2307 of the sub bill (inadvertently added in the House version), a new Domestic Violence Advisory Board was created under the Attorney General's office. At the request of the AG's office, an amendment is being submitted that will delete the newly created committee and will utilize the existing State Victims Assistance Advisory Council so as not to create more bureaucracy. We would ask for your support on this amendment.

In closing, many victims of domestic violence flee with little resources. Our task as a Domestic Violence provider is to provide advocacy, education, safety planning, and assist victims in reclaiming their power to provide for themselves and their children. However due to lack of funding victims have a long and difficult path to financial freedom and stability. Barriers such as language, family size, poor rental history, and limited employment skills can impede a victim's ability to take care of themselves and their children.

Therefore, I am asking you to restore the "As Passed by House" version of the Domestic Violence Program. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.