

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee and Distinguished Guests,

My name is Stephen Snyder-Hill. I'm a proud Army Major, a resident of Columbus and a former Ohio State University student. All three of those distinctions are important today as I come before you to ask that you support HB 249, to rescind the statute of limitations for those who hope to hold Ohio State, and other state colleges, accountable for their actions – or, more accurately, inaction – in cases of sexual assault and abuse.

The Army lists seven core values that every new recruit is asked to embody and live by when signing up to serve our country: Duty. Honor. Integrity. Loyalty. Personal Courage. Respect. Selfless Service.

As a U.S. Army Major, I try to follow these core values every day, in both my military and civilian life. As an American, they are the qualities I hope others will aspire to as well.

As a citizen of Ohio, they are the values I hope you will pursue today.

In 1995, I went to student health services at Ohio State to seek medical attention for a lump on my chest. I was sent to Dr. Richard Strauss and, instead of treating me, he sexually assaulted me. Dr. Strauss asked unnecessary and inappropriate questions about my sexual orientation and sexual desires. He then performed what he said were necessary testicular and rectal examinations – neither of which, of course, was actually necessary or had anything to do with the reason I sought medical attention in the first place. And when Dr. Strauss finally got around to checking the lump on my chest, he pressed his pelvic area against my side and I could feel his erect penis pressed against me throughout the prolonged examination of my chest. It was shocking and very intimidating. And I complained the very next day.

Specifically, I spoke with an OSU nurse at Student Health, who put my complaint in writing, and then asked to speak with the head of student health services, who was Dr. Ted Grace, at the time. After speaking with Dr. Grace, he set up an in-person meeting that included him, Dr. Strauss, OSU's director of counseling, and me. During that meeting, Dr. Strauss slammed his hand on the table and yelled at me and said I was trying to ruin his reputation. It was traumatic to be confronted in this way by the man who had just sexually abused me. At the end, OSU's employees said this was all a misunderstanding and I was confused about what happened. But I was not confused. I knew what happened to me was wrong.

So, I persisted and spoke with Dr. Grace again to demand three things: that he promise there were no other complaints; that if someone else complained I would be notified; and that they would document all of this in Dr. Strauss's file. Dr. Grace agreed to most of my demands on that call. At the end of the call, I asked him to put his promises in writing. And he did. In his letter, he promised me that the Student Health forms would be changed to permit a chaperone and permit students to opt out of genital and rectal exams. And he promised me that my complaint and any future complaints against Dr. Strauss would be maintained in a quality assurance file. But Dr. Grace falsely told me that no one had ever complained about Dr. Strauss before and that Student Health had only received positive comments about Dr. Strauss—even though, as I learned a few months ago when the Perkins Coie report was released, another student had made a similar complaint to Student Health just 3 *days* before mine.

We now know that, in fact, Dr. Strauss sexually abused and assaulted countless students during his 20-year tenure at OSU. And I know – because I came forward – that OSU officials knew about what was happening, but turned a blind eye. Instead of holding Dr. Strauss accountable, they continued to insist students see him for medical attention.

I've joined scores of other former OSU students to hold the University accountable in court and demand changes that would prevent this from ever happening again. When we came forward, OSU's response wasn't to deny what Dr. Strauss did. OSU said: Its. Just. Been. Too. Long. For many students, Ohio's statute of limitations presents an obstacle to ensuring OSU is held accountable for what school officials allowed Dr. Strauss to do again ... and again ... and again.

I am here today because I believe our laws and our lawmakers should prioritize protecting students against sexual assault rather than maintaining policies that protect universities that cover up the truth and look the other way. Neither Ohio State, nor any other college or university, should be able to use the law to help them protect and cover-up serial sexual predators like Dr. Strauss.

I believe my experience shows that any student – of any gender or background – can be the target of sexual abuse when those who are supposed to lead look the other way instead. Today, I am asking you to send survivors a strong message: Ohio's leaders will no longer look the other way. And let's send Ohio State a message, too: Time does not un-do the damage inflicted when predators like Dr. Strauss are given free rein to abuse young people, and the law shouldn't either.

Our laws and rules, and basic moral decency, should demand accountability for people like Dr. Strauss and those who enable them. This Committee can be the first step in making sure that happens.

Ohio State had four decades to do the right thing but never so much as lifted a finger to stop Dr. Strauss or help the students he abused. Despite numerous students coming forward and reporting his abuse to numerous school officials, nothing ever happened. But because of the school's efforts to sweep everything under the rug, many students didn't even understand that Dr. Strauss was abusing them. And they had no idea of the role OSU was playing in covering up the abuse. And now that they do understand all of those things, OSU wants to lean on Ohio's statute of limitations as a way to try to make its responsibility for what happened evaporate into thin air.

Well I'm here today to say – loud and clear and to all of you and all of OSU – that what happened to me and the other survivors doesn't just fade away. The ramifications of inaction – like the inaction we've seen from OSU – do not expire. And neither should the opportunity to hold accountable those who perpetuate and encourage abuse.

On behalf of all those abused, assaulted and mistreated by Dr. Strauss and OSU, I ask today for action. A vote for HB 249 is a vote to uphold those same core values that have always made our armed forces – and our great state of Ohio – strong: Duty. Honor. Integrity. Loyalty. Personal Courage. Respect. Selfless Service.

Please, show OSU the power of those values to effect the change it has refused to make on its own.