

Thank you Chairman Butler, Vice-Chair Manning, and Ranking Member Stinziano and the members of the House Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to testify in support of this very important piece of legislation, HB 392.

I have spent years advocating and bringing awareness to domestic violence and trying to help turn victims into survivors. I spent 5 years as an advocate working at our county domestic violence shelter with women and their children escaping abusive relationships. Part of that job was handling crisis calls that came in to the center 24/7. During my time at the shelter I heard stories from our victims about true lack of misunderstanding they received from various sources and their particular needs that were not being met. Those stories guided me into my next position which was serving as an Asst. Outreach Advocate for ALL victims of violence seeking civil protection orders.

Today I stand before you, one person, but I am representing years and countless stories of victims who because of the wording in our outdated Revised Code (R.C.) were lost in loopholes and did not receive protection as they should have. It was my job to make sure victims understood the complete Civil Protection Order or (CPO) process before they started. This was incredibly frustrating as I told a victim what the law was and how it was stated in the R.C. that potentially a protection order might not be granted because their particular definition of their relationship did not fall into a specific category, with this bill they can seek relief under HB 392 with the definition and reference of "intimate partner". We need to modernize our domestic violence laws so that our Magistrates and Judges can also help a victim as the law states by issuing orders of protection. We know about abusers and their patterns of control; that they like to scare victims with lies which is another reason why we always went completely through the CPO process with our crisis callers or clients so they knew what they were getting into because knowledge is truly power.

Statics have told us time and time again that first 48 hours after a victim leaves a relationship is the most critical and dangerous time for them. Working in a domestic violence shelter I can tell you that is absolutely true and why we had a 48 Rule when seeking shelter. Having read numerous text messages, email, listened to voicemails coming in from abusers who had lost control and were freaking out was scary for our victims. We need to make sure when a victim decides to leave they can access proper protection that can help end the cycle of violence and move them towards a healthy relationship. In the agency were I worked we not only helped with the paperwork, attended the hearings but we also made sure to educate our clients. Some had never even heard of the power and control wheel and the first time they saw it was when we showed them.

Not every victim wants to pursue criminal charges, for whatever their own reasons may be, they may just want to move on and be left alone. A civil protection order lets them do that. If a victim did have an incident that did prompt a criminal charge with a Protection order, that order goes away when the case is finalized, which then leaves our victim vulnerable during a crucial time. That's where having a civil protection order in place is critical, since the protection can last up to five (5) years. This can be done simultaneously with a criminal proceeding. Another area we saw often had difficulties with was when an abuser would shirked right on the line of getting a criminal charge because they were educated enough to know, What NOT to do or what not to say. Here again, is another example where a civil protection order can help assist a victim moving forward.

My work within the shelter and assisting with civil protections orders led me into law enforcement where I currently hold a dual commission. I am a full-time police officer with the NEOMED Police Department and also a Special Deputy with the Portage County Sheriff's Office.

From the law enforcement perspective, this bill would give us another resource to give to victims on a first responder basis. Two quick scenarios. First one being, If we are called out on a suspected verbal altercation between a couple and deem after our investigation that no charges are able to be filed we can advise them about to call into an advocacy center and receive information on possibly acquiring a CPO. We know that it takes an average of 6 to 7 times for a victim to leave a situations and victims all most always minimize the abuse because of embarrassment, who is around them while they are speaking or even other reasons. Being able to give a victim one more resource to help educate themselves and get them out of that relationship and one day into a healthier one is what law enforcement and advocates strive for.

The second scenarios is, say an assault happens and it is discovered through an investigation that although the couple was dating but they recently broke up. They never lived together, they have no children together, while the victim is protected under a protection order that can be filed from the current criminal proceeding, as soon as the case is finalized their protection goes away. Under HB 392, they could seek a CPO that could be put in place for up to five years, giving them an extra layer of support as the finalize their case and move forward, Just because a case ends does not mean their fear goes away in fact sometimes it escalates.

In closing, I would like to commend Representative Kuhns and Representative Sykes for introducing this legislation in and their leadership on this extremely important issue that will help close a loophole that many Ohioans have slipped through.

Thank you.

