Proponent testimony submitted to the
Ohio House State and Local Government Committee
House Bill 719
Rosa Beltre, Executive Director
Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence
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Chair Anielski, Vice-Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and Members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 719. As Ohio's statewide coalition, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) advocates for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services for survivors and empowers communities to prevent sexual violence.

I am here today to share with you OAESV's particular interest in this legislation, which, if passed, will create a statewide tracking system for rape kit processing. As this committee is aware, Attorney General Mike DeWine has worked in conjunction with state officials, county prosecutors, rape crisis programs, OAESV, and others to address Ohio's rape kit backlog. Through the Sexual Assault Kit Testing (SAK) Initiative, just under 14,000 rape kits were processed, suspects were identified, and convictions were achieved. Throughout this extensive effort, the Attorney General's team not only sought to rectify past practices that led to the backlog, it worked to preclude a backlog from happening again. House Bill 719 represents a major part of this proactive work.

Specifically, House Bill 719, and its companion Senate Bill 323, are the result of Attorney General DeWine's formation of and work with the Ohio Attorney General's Advisory Group on Sexual Assault Kit Tracking (Advisory Group). Members of the Advisory Group include forensic scientists, forensic nurses, forensic laboratory personnel, prevention professionals, health economics professionals, sexual violence experts, law enforcement, and prosecutors. Thus, in developing this legislation, input was provided from experts involved in every phase of a rape kit's movement from hospital to CODIS, as well as those involved in utilizing evidence for prosecutions.

As part of the Advisory Group, OAESV is confident that HB 719 and SB 323 will meet Ohio's need for a transparent system that allows survivors of sexual violence to track their rape kits, increasing transparency and accountability, as well as confidence in the criminal justice system. Specifically, these bills provide a mechanism for establishing recommendations by the Advisory Group for the statewide sexual assault examination kit tracking system and require the Attorney General to create, operate, and maintain said tracking system based on Advisory Board recommendations. Per the Advisory Group's

recommendations, the tracking system will create a barcode system for tracking kits at each phase of processing, from the medical facility where evidence was collected, to receipt by law enforcement, entry into storage, shipment to forensic laboratories, completion of analysis, and destruction (or storage after testing, depending on case needs). Per HB 719 and SB 323, the Advisory Group will continue to meet and make recommendations until the system's finalization deadline.

As the statewide expert on sexual violence, OAESV stands firm in its support of this legislation. Survivors consistently report that lack of transparency in the status of their rape kit creates confusion and additional stress. Having the ability to anonymously check the status of their rape kit, with an access code no one else outside of the criminal justice system has access to, will increase confidence in the system, lead to more predictability in their case, and reduce the additional turmoil associated with confusion in a pending criminal prosecution. Based on its participation in the Advisory Group, OAESV is extremely confident that the Attorney General has drawn the appropriate expertise to implement a well-designed system that meets the needs of Ohio survivors and the criminal justice system alike.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. I am available to answer any questions by email at rbeltre@oaesv.org or by phone at 216-317-1828.