



The comprehensive resource on domestic violence

Proponent Testimony House Bill 49
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Chairman Jordan, Vice Chair O'Brien, and members of the Senate Finance: General Government and Agency Review Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide supportive testimony for the Domestic Violence Fund in Substitute House Bill 49. I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network, Ohio's statewide domestic violence coalition. The Ohio Domestic Violence Network, Ohio's federally recognized statewide domestic violence coalition, serves as a critical resource for professional training, resources, public education and advocacy for Ohio's domestic violence agencies and other allied organizations.

While you were sipping your coffee this morning hundreds of victims of domestic violence were waking up in shelters across Ohio, safe for the time being. When your kids left for school, children across the state were heading into a new school, hauling back packs and school supplies provided by their domestic violence shelter. As you head home tonight, many survivors will be learning how to request protections orders or will be attending support groups. Your friends and neighbors will be attending meetings, learning about the devastating problem of domestic violence your community. Ohio's domestic violence programs provide desperately needed services to family who are fleeing for their lives; shelters provide a safe haven in a time of uncertainty, they work closely with law enforcement, the courts, health care professionals and others to secure community resources to end the violence.

In Ohio 100% of domestic violence programs participated in the annual DV Counts census held in September each year. In 2016, on that day in Ohio, 1,134 victims found refuge in emergency shelters, while 881 received other assistance including legal advocacy and counseling, and 1,051 individuals in communities across Ohio attended training provided by domestic violence programs. Sadly, on that day there were 115 unmet requests for services, most for shelter because programs did not have the resources to provide these services.

Ohio's 69 domestic violence programs do an amazing job with the limited resources they have, helping victims recover from trauma, find housing, helping them secure protection orders, therapy for their children, stability, and support. Every day, victims who have no other place to turn, find refuge, safety, resources, information and a new hope that they can re-build safer lives for themselves and their children.

Currently, Ohio's domestic violence programs are funded by competitive federal grants and a small portion of the counties marriage and divorce license fees. The fee is \$17.00 per marriage license and \$27 per divorce, dissolution, or annulment. The fee is critically important; however, the vast majority of counties realize less than \$20,000 annually from this source (61 counties).

Ohio is only one of a very few states that do not provide state funding to support these services. The Ohio Domestic Violence Network investigated what other states include in their state budget for domestic violence. In studying 25 other states we found that most receive funding from a general revenue appropriation. The average allocation was \$7.5 million. Our neighboring states of Illinois and Pennsylvania receive \$18.3 million and \$15.4 million respectively each year.

The line item added to the Fiscal Year 2018-2019 operating budget allocates \$100,000 per year to the newly created Domestic Violence Program, which will be operated by the Attorney General's office. The funds will be used to provide services to victims of domestic violence, such as: education to prevent domestic violence, victim advocacy and support, and transitional services.

As a result of the economic downturn, domestic violence programs weathered reductions in foundation support, United Way dollars, and private giving. Yet the need for life-saving services has not decreased. These programs warrant an investment of state resources to continue their effective work with the many families they are helping and those they must currently turn away.

I appreciate the difficult task the General Assembly faces to pass a balanced budget by June 30th; I respectfully request that the Senate keep the Domestic Violence Fund in the budget. This small investment signifies that the State supports victims of domestic violence, and is following in the footsteps of many states around the country to help provide desperately needed funds to allow the programs to continue to provide aid to the victims of domestic violence and their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of the Domestic Violence Fund; I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.