

House Bill 282

Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, my name is the Most Reverend Dr. Christine Johnson. I am the Co-Presiding Archbishop of the Worldwide Anglican Church, Chaplain #4226 of the International Federation of Christian Chaplains, President and Chief Marketing Officer of the Global Parenting Network, Chancellor of the African Trinity Theological College, Regent Governor and Professor of Doctoral Studies at the Jesus Seminary of the Himalayas, Patron of the St Agnes Christian Education Center, Chairwoman of a number of committees and councils around the world, a former United Nations Representative over Armenia, India, and the Congo, and with a background in the Chamber of Commerce for Wyoming and New Jersey. I was the Chief of staff for Agriculture, Energy and Natural Resources, Government Affairs, and Retail Development.

I am here today to testify as a proponent of House Bill 282 and to discuss ways in which the charitable dollars raised through instant bingo impact our local communities.

We have all known the boy or girl, man or woman who fits the title of the, "Bully." Some of you may have been bullied at school, in the workplace, or even at home, and it instills a sense of fear, outrage, and shame, which leads to failure to thrive.

We all want to be, or love to see the person we call, "Hero." Who does not want to rescue an innocent person being victimized, marginalized, and injured by the bully? We are and should be outraged when we hear of people in our community suffering serious injury and death at the hands of an uncontrollable individual. And yet sometimes we can feel powerless to help. Who do we turn to in such circumstances? Many of us, and God forbid our wives, husbands, sisters, brothers, daughters, sons, and other loved ones, including our friends and colleagues, become the ones we call, "Victim." The problem is it is hard to find a hero.

Over the last 8 years \$70 million dollars has been collected and divided equally between significant improvements to Ohio VFW posts and contributions to other Ohio charities. If the House Bill 282 does not pass, the \$35 million given to Ohio charities will not be made, and that quite frankly is a frightening and unimaginable prospect. I cannot stress enough that this is crucial funding that our communities desperately need, particularly during these horrific days that have brought unprecedented hardship, death, abuse, hunger, unemployment, homelessness, and a myriad of other negative events and emotions that will take years to recover from. Right now, our communities need as much help as is possible and over the next few minutes, I wish to address some important issues that we are facing, which will identify why we need you to be Ohio's heroes and heroines and vote in favor of HB 282.

This Bill will continue to fund proven beneficial programs, for our families, our youth, and our military for example including the Valor Home, Save a Warrior, and the VA. Our son GQ Johnson was a member of City Year and he was actually dressed in his red jacket ready to go off to serve when he tragically died in 1999 from diabetes at the age of 19 years. My husband is a Vietnam Veteran with Agent Orange and PTSD. He has survived nine strokes, seven heart attacks, cancer, and a brain aneurysm. He is truly a warrior, like all our military heroes who ask for so little, but deserve not just so much more, but rather everything we can possibly find to give them, so they can continue, with dignity, to give back to their communities in service to their nation.

My husband Greg and I run a dynamic non-profit called the Global Parenting Network. Every day we are heavily involved in helping our military in transition, and in community outreach to empower parents and identify children at risk. During this Covid pandemic, we have witnessed

firsthand the tremendous hardships due to inequity and inequality. As a Chaplain, I have not been able to sit with patients in their last few hours of life, and many have had to die alone. Normally, sitting vigil is a ministry that is profound for me, as I know how difficult it is for the patient and family to cope with the surge of emotions that accompany the death of themselves and their loved ones. I partner with many community organizations in Ohio, who engage in essential projects with youth, the homeless, domestic violence victims, in prison outreach, and food services. One such program involves distributing thousands of hot meals in North East Ohio, which I will be beginning on December 1st. Through increased self-esteem and confidence, not only do our youth programs teach children and teenagers to stand up for themselves, but they also have the courage to speak up and stop others from bullying. That is how they can be a hero for themselves.

Passing this bill is one of the best ways to stop violence in kids. We can either provide an outlet for natural aggression and a thirst for risk through supervised programs or ignore it and see it erupt in terrible and tragic ways. This is not a PlayStation game scenario. This is reality to combat young people's readiness for violence, with no concept of the consequences, which I assure you has only been exasperated with the lockdown and social distancing.

Youth crime has soared by a third in recent years and a new culture of violence seems to be emerging - an entertainment brand of happy slapping and computer-game mimicry: virtual violence played out in a real world, with tragic consequences. One of the problems is that computer games have become the predominant outlet for young people's natural aggression. We now live in world stifled physically by health and safety regulations where competition or risk of any kind is a dirty word - particularly in schools.

Programs like Round 1 with Rev. Eason reaches out to the places that other sports do not reach. Why? Because it engages with young people on their own terms and recognizes this frustration and aggression that is so often the hallmark of teenage years. It reaches into the underground, anarchical world, which engulfs so many school dropouts, which many other forms of social engagement cannot penetrate. They stop labelling themselves as dropouts; the frantic quest to prove themselves by bravado is not necessary. They no longer feel that they have to pick fights but can walk away. The skills that he instills gives them the confidence to give school a chance and to make job applications. Young boxers turn from outcasts to role models. We have got to start making some choices. We can either provide an outlet for natural aggression and a thirst for risk through supervised boxing or ignore it and see it erupt in terrible and tragic ways.

This Bill is crucial to assist needy veterans and their families around the state by providing food banks, youth projects, community projects, and homeless programs, and we must goal assist those military men and women returning from war and their families. Homeless programs are essential as we consider the estimated 10,000 homeless people battling with this coronavirus, which places us all in unprecedented danger. Our displaced sit in 300 designated homeless shelters, group homes and recovery housing, and people are at high risk causing unique problems amongst vulnerable populations in dense situations, often senior citizens with pre-existing health conditions, and some with children. You cannot just get them to stay home when there is no home to go to, and these destitute people who get infected are twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to need critical care, and have twice or three times the mortality rate.

The funding in this Bill is critical in the fight against domestic violence. Ohio suffered 109 domestic violence fatalities in the year ending June 30, 2020 – a 35% increase in fatalities over the same time period last year. More than 40% of the fatalities occurred as part of a homicide/suicide, and at least 70% of the fatalities were caused by guns. History has shown that

domestic violence increases in the aftermath of disaster, and the economic downturn and Stay-at-Home Order caused by the pandemic are likely contributing to an increase in violence. Many programs are reporting an increase in the number of survivors seeking help, and many more programs are reporting an increase in the severity of the abuse they are hearing about from callers to their hotlines and from survivors seeking shelter. It makes sense that the need for physical distancing since March may have made victims – especially those with children – less likely to seek shelter. It was more difficult and confusing for some victims to go to court to ask for help during the first three months of the pandemic.

Fatalities included targeted victims, perpetrators, and others at incidents involving intimate partner relationships.

1. 18% of cases involved children at the scene.
2. 38% of cases involved suicide.
3. There were 71 male perpetrators and 7 female perpetrators.
4. In one case there were 2 perpetrators.
5. 1 Law Enforcement Officer was killed in the line of duty by a batterer.
6. 109 fatalities - In 77 cases - 71 deceased victims, and 39 deceased perpetrators (55 female fatalities and 54 male fatalities).
7. 4 young victims were killed, including two 2-year old girls, a six-year-old boy, and a 17-year-old girl.
8. At least 20 perpetrators had previously been charged with or convicted of domestic violence prior to the fatal incident. 8 cases required SWAT or Strategic Response Team action from law enforcement.
9. In 22 cases, there was both a homicide and a suicide.
10. The oldest victim was an 82-year-old man.
11. In at least 27% of fatality cases, the victim of intimate partner violence had ended the relationship or was in the process of ending the relationship.
12. 18% Of cases involved children at the scene.
13. 88 people were killed or injured by guns.
14. In at least 70% of fatalities, the deceased were killed by guns, excluding shootings by Law Enforcement.

This funding is vital for programs in the prevention of suicide in our youth. Nearly 7 percent of more than 1,200 teens across Ohio said they attempted suicide over the last few months. 15.8 percent of Black teens said they attempted suicide at least once, compared to 4.1 percent of white teens. A sweeping new examination of suicide in Ohio in the past decade finds that 37 of the 88 counties now surpass the national rate, and the coronavirus pandemic likely is triggering a staggering increase in such deaths. Gov. Mike DeWine recently called for more public awareness and a more coordinated statewide effort to prevent the tragedies from happening. Students deal with numerous issues outside of the classroom that affect their performance in schools. Students regularly have to deal with societal issues ranging from poverty, homelessness, and hunger to bullying, suicide and drug use. These resources can assist districts in helping their students.

Domestic violence is not just behind closed doors. Several incidents occurred on public roadways. Perpetrators are frequently known to extend their menacing behavior in traffic, driving recklessly, weaponizing vehicles as a tool of their abuse. One victim was killed when her abuser veered into a tree as he was being pursued by police. Another threw his partner out on the freeway, resulting in her death, and a third tried to take over the steering wheel, exited the car, and apparently walked into traffic, resulting in his death. One abuser abducted his estranged wife, and as law

enforcement followed the truck, he swerved, pulled into a driveway, and fired two fatal shots, ending her life and his. Sadly, one law enforcement officer in a different incident lost her life when she was intentionally rammed by an abuser as she tried to aid in his apprehension. The need for a domestic violence program in East Cleveland became apparent as Judge Keenon's court was encumbered with more and more domestic violence cases. Today, it is just as real and ever increasing.

Ohio needs to expand our services to children and other crime victims as well. Stress, fear, and anger can cause a person to react inappropriately to situations and circumstances in a violent manner, especially if they have been exposed to violence and have not been taught how to respond to their anger in non-violent ways. As efforts increase to reduce local jail populations amid legitimate concerns about the infection of persons held there, domestic violence survivors and our programs often use a wide range of avenues to gain information, resources and support to increase safety for them and their children. In many families, victims are now at home with their abusers and children as more and more Ohioans become unemployed or work from home.

Before the Covid 19 pandemic, survivors may have found support at places of employment or worship, in community groups, through family and friends, at school, at medical and counseling appointments, and through other social contacts. They might have had hours each day away from violent partners to seek help. The pandemic related closures of schools and businesses and limits on gatherings also limit these traditional avenues for safety. So, it is especially important that victims can rely upon law enforcement and domestic violence programs to respond effectively.

Research published in 2019 by The Ohio State University and Ohio Domestic Violence Network discovered that over 8 in 10 survivors in Domestic Violence advocacy services were targeted for head trauma and strangulation by abusers, often repeatedly and concurrently. Meanwhile, programs had limited knowledge and training on partner-inflicted brain injury. The final report was sent to all United States congressional staff members, as well as two senate and three house committees.

The pandemic presents new challenges for domestic violence survivors, and for the service providers who serve them. There's early evidence indicating that the pandemic's various financial and social stressors, coupled with the fact that people are being asked to shelter at home with abusive partners, are leading to an increase in the number of these cases. For example, research published in August by the National Commission on Criminal Justice found that during the first three months of the pandemic, 14 large U.S. cities saw a 7.5 percent increase in calls for service to police for domestic violence incidents.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, we hear people declaring, "This is a matter of life and death," and we search our conscience to ascertain if their words have merit. I am a pragmatic person who is responsible for hundreds of thousands of people around the world. I have to make life and death decisions on a regular basis. I have the responsibility of allocating financial resources and I am forced sometimes to make critical decisions including who receives funding, which house can we rebuild, which child can we give food and medicine, and how can we fly a body home to be buried with dignity. I do not accept a salary for my position as an Archbishop because I am honored to say that our churches serve some of the most economically challenged communities in the world. I work exceedingly hard in Ohio, and I know the problems our families and communities are facing today. I thank God for the VFW, whose officers have freely assisted me with Color Guards at

funerals, and I know firsthand the immense work and support they give to so many people who will fall through the cracks if this HB 282 is dismissed.

The passing of this Bill is absolutely essential and for many people, it IS literally a matter of life and death. Much of the crucial funding we need comes from the proceeds of this bill. If the House Bill 282 does not pass, the \$35 million given to Ohio charities will not be made. That crucial funding is desperately needed, particularly during these horrific days that have brought unprecedented hardship, death, abuse, hunger, unemployment, homelessness, and a myriad of other negative events and emotions that will take years to recover from. \$35 million dollars may not seem like a hefty amount of money to those who live quite comfortably. But each and every dollar of that money is food for a family, essential social worker's funding, and specialized equipment like a hyperbaric chamber for the VA to help a veteran with PTSD. It is a safe room for a terrified woman escaping a violent life, and it is books, clothing, and other crucial tools that our men, women, and children in the United States of America need, and frankly deserve.

I pray that one thing this pandemic has taught us, is that tomorrow is not guaranteed, and we are all in this fight together. Our Ohioans need help today, and they will need this charitable money for the foreseeable future. Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, please place HB 282 onto the floor today and vote in favor.

Thank you, and God bless you for your support.