

Testimony on SB 17 before the Senate Judiciary Committee
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My name is Mary O’Doherty and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. We are a coalition of the state’s more than domestic violence programs, and I am here today to speak in support of SB 17. Last year our member programs served more than 60,000 survivors and domestic violence across the state. Those victims needed shelter or help obtaining a protective order or support while they prosecuted their abusers. Many of them were looking for housing and other assistance as they worked to rebuild their lives after experiencing abuse.

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network strongly supports SB 17.

It’s common for sexual assault survivors to question whether or not they should contact law enforcement and report their assault. While many believe that a survivor should report their assault right away, and may even be frustrated by a survivor’s hesitancy to do so, there are many reasons why a sexual assault survivor may not immediately report the crime.

Sexual assault takes an enormous physical and emotional toll on a survivor, who may still be processing what happened, and may not be totally ready to handle retelling their story. Reporting can feel invasive and extremely difficult. While some survivors may feel reporting their experience to the police will help them seek justice against their attacker, it is important to remember that survivors do not have complete control over this process.

Since community-based programs began serving victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking, privacy and even secrecy have been considered a crucial component of a victim’s safety. This is why many emergency domestic violence shelter locations are still confidential and why many states have laws that prohibit publishing the names of rape victims. Many states, including Ohio, have address confidentiality programs for victims of domestic and sexual violence and stalking so that survivors do not have to give out their home addresses.

Despite state and federal laws, in this age of advanced technology, increased data collection, and increased data sharing, it has become more difficult than ever for survivors to limit the sharing of their personal information. Despite strict state and federal laws and advocacy prioritizing survivor privacy, sensitive information can be exposed, leaving survivors unwilling to disclose their abuse and get help.

SB17, which would prohibit law enforcement agencies from including identifying information of sexual assault victims in police reports online, is an important step in the right direction. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak in support of SB 17.