

Proponent Testimony Submitted to the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Bill 196
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Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 196.

I was raped. It was a cold night in November; I was a high school senior and only 17 years old. I was at a small party, in an obscure home and had consumed one too many drinks. After an uneventful night, I fell asleep only to wake to an unfamiliar person assaulting me. Looking back with nearly 15 years of wisdom, I didn't react in a manner that I would expect of myself today. I didn't yell. I didn't scream. I didn't come to with Olympic precision. I didn't kick, punch or shout. Instead, I only remember lying limp, frozen, terrified and dazed. I was trapped.

Have you ever felt as though life has left you? I hope you haven't. However, this description is the only way I can illustrate my catatonic state. He finished, life came back to me and I escaped. Looking back, I realize there were a series of unfortunate events, which led me to this split-level home in the conventional suburb of Gahanna, Ohio.

I wish as a young girl I had a higher sense of self. I wish the small group of kids who bullied me in school didn't bother me so much. I wish I had more confidence to say "no" to my peers when presented with a bad decision like consuming alcohol underage. Yet, these collective life experiences do not justify violating another human being.

Words cannot explain the terror and lasting impact of being sexually assaulted. A high school friend urged me to go to the hospital the following morning. The hospital's staff recommended I file a report with the police and encouraged me to complete the required testing for the Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence (SAFE) kit. I was terrified. I grew up in a small conservative town. My parents immigrated to the United States with the sole purpose of providing a better life for themselves and their future family. As a young girl, I always carried the greatest level of admiration for my teachers, coaches and adult leaders. I was taught that when you have a problem, it's good and encouraged to inform the authority figures in your life. Because these caring adults are a driving force for enabling positive results. Reporting every step of my experience was terrifying. Despite the shock, I believed telling my truth was the right thing to do.

After submitting the police report, I was instructed to take a polygraph test. However, within no more than an hour's time, my world once again was turned upside down. The uniformed test administrator told me I was lying about the night's events. She told me I should rewrite my statement because, as I paraphrase, "She was once a young woman who had found herself next to men she didn't quite remember the following morning far too many times in college."

I refused to rewrite my statement. As a young girl, and now as an adult, I have always carried the utmost respect for the men and women who serve our country so bravely. When these men and women put on their uniform, they are heroes who symbolize a community's safety and public trust. However, at this specific moment in time, I strongly believe the system failed me. One out of every six American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime (14.8% completed, 2.8%

attempted).¹ Most sexual assaults are not reported.² Only 310 out of every 1,000 sexual assaults are reported to police, meaning about two out of three goes unreported.³ Because of experiences like mine, the vast majority of perpetrators will not go to jail or prison. Out of every 1,000 rapes, 994 perpetrators will walk free.⁴

This experience changed me. In one of my most critical times of need, I was told that I lied. I was told that no one saw what happened. Because I didn't kick, because I didn't punch and because I did not shout - my assault did not happen. I have spent years second-guessing my decisions from this night. However, my one constant beacon of hope has been the numerous advocates I've encountered throughout the years. These advocates come in many forms. They include friends like the one I called the day of my assault who lent her shoulder for me to cry. They include the men and women who run local rape crisis centers, like the one I called in college when I needed unbiased guidance regarding my options for getting additional help. They are the call center first responders who were a comforting and silent voice during inconsolable crying from a recent panic attack. Lastly, these advocates include my husband who is and continues to be a stalwart rock of understanding.

As many advocates know, survivors often report shame, stigma and embarrassment after an assault. Many cases go unreported because victims fear retaliation or believe the police will not do anything to help.⁵ Therefore, having the opportunity for a confidential space with an advocate is frequently perceived as safer for initial reporting. My initial report was to my high school friend. For others, this may be an advocate at a rape crisis center or a co-worker.

As a survivor, I should not be relegated to anonymous calls for help. My advocates are invaluable resources where I can share my truth. Supporting Advocate Privilege means supporting young women like me. It means providing young girls with the confidence to speak openly about the support and services they need to survive. The trajectory of my life changed forever that brisk November day. Now, as an advocate for survivors of sexual assault, I hope our Ohio legislators will give me the opportunity to pass on the acts of kindness so many have compassionately given to me.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 196. I am available to answer any additional questions you have at sophiafifner@gmail.com.

¹ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics>

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*