

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for having me here today to speak in support of Senate Bill 162, which would eliminate the statute of limitation for rape in the state of Ohio.  My name is Michelle Stratton and I am the President of the Ohio Chapter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses.

The International Association of Forensic Nurses is an international membership organization comprised of forensic nurses working around the world and other professionals who support and complement the work of forensic nursing. The IAFN consists of over 5,000 members with 263 located in Ohio. Forensic Nurses are Registered or Advanced Practice nurses who have received specific education and training. Forensic nurses provide specialized care for patients who are experiencing acute and long-term health consequences associated with victimization or violence, and/or have unmet evidentiary needs relative to having been victimized or accused of victimization.

 It is the position of IAFN that forensic nurses have a professional and ethical responsibility to serve, advocate for and empower patients, families, and their communities [1, 2, 3]. Forensic nurses have the opportunity to improve the overall long-term health outcomes that result from violence.  Forensic nurses are uniquely positioned in intersecting systems such as healthcare, community and legal environments for early identification of patients at risk of victimization or perpetration of violence [1]. A primary goal of forensic nursing programs is to raise public awareness that violence is a public health issue that impacts healthcare systems and communities worldwide. To that end, forensic nurses promote interventions that prevent or confront the causes of violence and strengthen the health care response to those affected by violence [1].

Sexual violence is a health care issue that destroys the quality of life in societies and communities worldwide. The aftermath of violence creates complex health issues requiring the dedicated efforts of professionals. Nursing professionals are ethically bound to promote health, welfare, and safety of all people [2, 3]. Using the science of nursing, forensic science and public health, forensic nurses are uniquely qualified to assess, formulate a nursing diagnosis treat, monitor, educate, evaluate, and intervene for persons of all ages affected by violence, minimizing the short and long-term effects of violence [1]. Healthy People 2010 supports health care services, which focus on both treatment and prevention for all members of the global community [4].

Patients who have experienced a sexual assault may not disclose immediately. However, many patients do report to someone they know and trust and patients may report to medical, legal, advocacy, or law enforcement any time after an assault, including years later. Immediate and long term health concerns may need to be addressed, as well as trauma related to the assault.  Many patients will experience fear of not being believed, fear or retaliation for some aspect of the assault, or secondary trauma, when an individual discloses an assault to a non-supporting individual which can lead to a disclosure long after the actual assault takes place [5].

It is our position, the Ohio Chapter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses that removing the statute of limitations on sexual assault cases is consistent with the physical and mental affects of a sexual assault that prohibit immediate disclosure. It is our position that, as a society, we should promote disclosure whenever it occurs with the recognition that sustained societal change requires action that includes support of research, development of public policy and passage of legislation to effectively reduce and eliminate the causes, consequences and costs of violence [1]. Removing the statute of limitations is consistent with behavioral effects of trauma and allows for other partners to maintain a safe society.

 It is our hope that Ohio will understand that every individual responds to traumatic events differently and there should never be a time limit to healing, reporting, or justice.

The Ohio Chapter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses is thankful to the sponsors, Senator Antonio and Senator O’Brien. We are grateful that they have recognized that it is time that Ohio joins the 16 other states in the country that have already eliminated the statute of limitation on rape.

The Ohio Chapter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses expresses its support for the passage of SB 162. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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1. American Nurses Association and International Association of Forensic Nurses, Forensic nursing: Scope and standards of practice 2nd Edition. 2017: Washington, DC.

2. American Nurses Association, Code of ethics with interpretive statements. 2005, American Nurses Association: Washington, DC.

3. International Association of Forensic Nurses, IAFN vision of ethical practice. 2008, International  Association of Forensic Nurses: Arnold, NJ.

4. U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy people in healthy communities. 2001, U. S. Government Printing Office: Washington, DC.

5. Iva A. E. Bicanic, Lieve M. Hehenkamp, Elise M. van de Putte, Arjen J. van Wijk & Ad de Jongh (2015) Predictors of delayed disclosure of rape in female adolescents and young adults, European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 6:1, 25883, DOI: 10.3402/ejpt.v6.25883