

THE OFFICE OF
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From: Sheriff Jeffrey D. Paden,

To: The Chair, The Vice-Chair, The Ranking Member, and Members of the Criminal Justice
Committee

Date: November 16, 2020

SUBJ: HB 196

I am writing this letter of support for House Bill 196 that would give privilege to qualified advocates. Advocates in this community, especially advocates at the Haven of Hope are a CRITICAL asset not only to the Guernsey County Sheriff's Office, but this community as a whole.

The Haven of Hope is a comprehensive agency that provides direct services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The Haven of Hope is also vested in assisting Law Enforcement in felony restitution cases. The direct service needs include crisis intervention, counseling, ER/hospital accompaniment, hotline counseling, emergency food, clothing, assistance with filing Victims of Crime Compensation, Victim's Support Group, VINE assistance, transportation, emergency shelter, information/referral, follow-up services, and legal advocacy. The Haven of Hope has such a detailed and comprehensive screening process that it addresses the needs of the client and forecasts future safety issues through a safety plan, which is constantly revised in the changing environment.

Victims of a heinous crime that the Haven of Hope assists the Sheriff's Office with, really only want one thing to happen. They want it to stop. They have trust issues and safety concerns because of the terror that has been bestowed upon them. They need a safe spot to recuperate so they can make life changing decisions to better their lives. They need to know that what they say is believed, validated and confidential so they can have a moment to weigh their options and decide what the best course of action is. Victims of crime do not want a stranger to be forced to tell their story, because it is not a stranger's story to tell. They want the option to have an advocate tell their story, giving them the CHOICE.

In smaller communities like the one that we live in, people know everyone. One of the major concerns for victims is that their abuser will know they were in my office or that they will find out that they have

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given details about their abuser's life. At the Sheriff's Office we work under confidentiality during an active investigation so that victims may feel more at ease, but it is factual that I find that a victim tends to open up to an advocate. Advocates are a massive part of the investigation and their ability to remain confidential with victims thoughts and words is a critical piece to investigations. In truth to have a victim bare their very soul to an advocate and later with investigators as relationships build does not provide a sacred place for victims to release all of the terror they have lived with. It does not give them peace of mind. It is always in the back of their minds that if I tell everything it may come out in court. If I tell everything, their abuser will know it came from them.

If Victim Advocates had privilege we could ease those concerns for victims when they seek help. This is an absolute game changer when building a foundation of trust with victims of serious crimes. We can tell them they can be comfortable in giving all of their pain and trauma to advocates. Then allowing trust to build with an advocate to hold criminals accountable on the terms of a victim. When a victim can tell their story in detail to an advocate and receive all of their options, they can make better decisions that will increase their safety and they can start to reclaim their lives.

Violence is about power and control over the victim. When we can give the victim control immediately over their situation it elevates their ability to recover. The only control a victim has is the when, to whom and how they tell their story. Give them the ability to tell it without holding back. Give them the privilege to do so.

I want to personally submit a letter of support of HB 196 and state how the Haven of Hope works together in collaboration with the Guernsey County Sheriff's Office. As I sat with my supervisory staff, it became evident that the collaboration that occurs between our two agencies indeed provides services to victims and families that I cannot find matched anywhere. This collaboration includes on scene victim and witness support, interviews, housing, to merely being there for my employees. I would venture to say that our collaboration and assistance to victims, truly aids in the successful prosecution of crimes that easily fall by the wayside due to victims not participating through the entire criminal justice process. Because of this steadfast relationship between the Guernsey County Sheriff's Office, we will continue to fully investigate all crimes of violence with great success, because we are partnered with the Haven of Hope, at times from the very crime scene. With the successful passing of HB 196 this holistic approach to collaboration and victim oriented services will be magnified exponentially.

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I am available for questions now or my email at sheriff.paden@guernseysheriff.com

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,


Jeffrey D. Paden

Guernsey County Sheriff