

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

**Donna Long
YWCA Dayton**

**Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee
HB 3 Proponent Testimony – Thursday, May 20, 2021**

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 3 (Aisha's Law), which would increase protections for domestic violence survivors across the state.

Sponsored by Representatives Boyd and Carruthers, Aisha's Law will prevent intimate-partner-violence-related homicide by providing a means for police and domestic violence advocates to assess a survivor's level of danger for future intimate partner violence following an incident. It will also assist in referring survivors to resources such as crisis intervention and counselling, housing, medical and legal. The bill would hold perpetrators accountable by prohibiting offenders from pleading down violent felonies to lesser charges if previously convicted for a violent felony.

A 2017 report from the CDC found that more than half of female homicide victims were killed in connection to intimate partner violence — and in 10 percent of those cases, violence shortly before the killing might have provided an opportunity for intervention. When previous incidents of domestic violence exist, the risk of homicide is 20 times higher. The report found that approximately one in 10 victims of intimate-partner-violence-related homicide experienced some form of violence in the month before their death.

A study conducted by the Washington Post of five major US cities found that more than one-third of all men who killed a current or former intimate partner were publicly known to be a potential threat to their loved one ahead of the attack. Thirty-six percent of the perpetrators in the study had a previous restraining order against them or had previously been convicted of domestic abuse or a violent crime.

This bill would expand the definitions of aggravated murder and child endangering to include domestic violence situations; establish local domestic violence high risk teams for handling incidents of domestic violence and protection order violations for high-risk victims; and require law enforcement officers to utilize a qualified lethality assessment screening tool to refer high-risk victims to a local team. The lethality assessment is a questionnaire designed to identify high-risk domestic violence cases, comprised of 11 questions regarding the relational and abuse history of the offender.

Aisha's Law would also make changes to evidentiary procedures in criminal cases involving domestic violence and in civil actions to recover damages based on an injury to person or property based on a criminal act of domestic violence. As the only provider of domestic violence shelters in Montgomery and Preble counties, YWCA Dayton is driven by a mission to empower women and prioritizes supporting women who are survivors of gender-based violence. YWCA Dayton provides 24/7, year-round shelter and supportive services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other forms of intimate-partner and gender-based violence. In 2020, YWCA Dayton provided more than 22,654 nights of shelter to over 264 women and children; answered 5,558 crisis calls; and provided more than 16,000 hours of advocacy, counseling, and crisis support.

The passage of Aisha's Law would be a life saving measure for survivors. By implementing a lethality assessment similar to the one used in the YW's shelters, the law would provide first responders with better information about the cycle of abuse and what resources they can provide to end the cycle. If every entity providing services has the same information about a survivor's situation, survivors will be more comfortable interacting with law enforcement, and we will have better outcomes.

In alignment with our mission, YWCA Dayton thus requests that you support the passage of House Bill 3 in support of our organization's service population and domestic violence survivors throughout the state.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.