



**Written Proponent Testimony on House Bill 121
House Criminal Justice Committee
May 26, 2021**

Chair Rae, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 121, legislation to close loophole laws that grant exceptions to spousal abuse.

My name is Stacey Foster and I am a SOS Clinician for LSS CHOICES, the only domestic violence shelter and crisis line in Franklin County. My job is to provide individual counseling for victims of intimate partner violence who are recovering from the trauma of abuse. My clients regularly experience sexual abuse at the hands of their spouses or significant others. The current law gives their abusers the power to do so without any concern of being prosecuted. This new bill will close that loophole and hold abusers accountable for their crimes.

I would like to offer an example of how this new bill would help a victim of spousal sexual abuse. I had a former client whose husband raped her, while making it clear that his intention was to impregnate her to trap her. It worked. She got pregnant twice via rape and was with him far longer than she would have chosen to be. She identified that pretty much all sex within their marriage was rape. In my work, I find that once 'no' is ignored, it's less likely that someone will say 'no' next time. So, one instance of rape turns into coercion for future sexual encounters.

Married victims should have the same protections from sexual assault as unmarried ones. Saying "I do" should never determine whether rape or sexual assault is criminal or not. For the safety of Ohio victims of domestic violence, please vote yes on this bill.