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District 18

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HB 254 – Sponsor Testimony
House Families, Aging and Human Services Committee
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Rep. Abrams

Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston and members of the House Families, Aging and Human Services Committee, thank you for giving Representative Boggs and I the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 254. By creating a pathway for counties and regions to establish domestic violence fatality review boards throughout the state, tailored to meet each county and region's needs, this bill will improve the response to domestic violence and work to prevent domestic violence fatalities.

According to a 2019 report from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, in Ohio, 35.6% of women and 30% of men experience intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner rape and/or intimate partner stalking in their lifetimes.

Over the years, and especially in the past year with more people staying at home, we have seen a devastating increase in domestic violence and domestic violence fatalities. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, in 2013, there were 38 domestic violence fatalities in Ohio. In 2020 alone, there were 109. Domestic violence occurs throughout the entire state of Ohio and according to the Ohio Domestic Violence Network, 29 of Ohio's 88 counties had fatal incidents of domestic violence within the time period of July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020.

HB 254 will create a comprehensive process of reviewing domestic violence deaths in Ohio through a lens of prevention and accountability.

I will now turn it over to my joint sponsor to explain how the boards will operate.

Rep. Boggs

The domestic violence fatality review boards outlined under this legislation will help the fight against domestic violence fatalities by:

- promoting continued communication between all groups, professions, agencies, or entities engaged in the prevention and education of domestic violence
- maintaining databases of the domestic violence fatalities to understand the causes and incidence of those deaths
- developing plans for implementing local service and program changes to the groups, professions, agencies, or entities that serve local residents that might prevent deaths by domestic violence
- providing the Department of Health with aggregate data, trends, and patterns concerning domestic violence fatalities

Similar to the existing Ohio Child Fatality Review Boards, this legislation will allow a board of county commissioners to appoint a health commissioner to establish their county's domestic violence fatality review board. The review boards will consist of 11 members appointed by the county health commissioner. These members will include professionals, such as the county coroner, chief of police and county prosecutor, who are equipped to address their county's domestic violence fatalities. Each review board will review the domestic violence deaths of individuals over eighteen years of age that occurred in the county.

By joint resolution, the boards of county commissioners of two or more counties may also elect to create a regional domestic violence fatality review board to review the domestic violence deaths of individuals over eighteen years of age that occurred in the participating counties.

Each board is required to submit an annual report to the Ohio Department of Health by April 1 of each year that reflects information gathered from the previous calendar year. The reports should include the total number of domestic violence deaths in the county or region, the total number of domestic violence deaths reviewed and the total number of domestic violence deaths not reviewed by the board, a summary of demographic information, including the sex, race and ethnicity, of the deceased and the perpetrators, a summary of any trends or patterns identified by the board, and finally, any recommendations for actions that might prevent future domestic violence deaths.

With the exception of the annual report submitted to ODH, any information, document, or report presented to a review board, all statements made by board members during meetings, all work products of the board, and all data submitted to ODH are confidential, exempt from the Public Records Law, and can only be used by the review board, its members, and ODH for purposes of the board.

Thank you again for allowing us the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 254. We would be happy to answer any questions committee members may have at this time.