

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 110 on behalf of CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence. As part of the Lutheran Social Services' Network of Hope, CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence has been the sole resource for victims seeking shelter in Franklin County for more than four decades. Our mission has always been - and continues to be – creating a better world by serving people in need; disrupting the cycle of domestic violence in our community and advocating for social change.

We write to you today to urge your support for an increase in the domestic violence services line item in the as-introduced version of the bill from \$1 million per FY to \$5 million per FY. Domestic violence is a terrible and increasingly pervasive problem that tears apart families and communities, a problem that has gotten increasingly worse throughout the pandemic. In the past year, the CHOICES domestic violence hotline has received a 16 percent increase in the number of high danger calls. Many domestic violence victims have hesitated to seek out help, and the need for shelter and community-based services has grown exponentially. Due to increased demand and limited resources, 114 survivors and their children had to be put on the waitlist in 2020 for shelter and services. Increased funding would expand our work to serve these families.

By investing in domestic violence prevention programming, Ohio is also investing in its communities. Children exposed to domestic violence often incur thousands of dollars in additional costs over the course of their lifetime for healthcare and supplemental services, in addition to missed workforce opportunities. Domestic violence services also decrease spending for additional law enforcement, criminal justice, and mental health support services. Inadequate funding for our programs and shelters not only hurts survivors and their families but is also dangerously detrimental to the law enforcement officials, social workers, and healthcare providers that heavily rely on our services.

Last October, funding from the Victims of Crime Act designated for domestic violence programs was cut by \$7.7 million. Throughout the past two years, grants will have been cut by almost 75 percent. We have been warned that additional cuts to our programs may be forthcoming. Without increased funding our organization cannot sustain our lifesaving work, including answering over 4,000 emergency hotline calls and assisting more than 1,800 victims with court processes and counseling in the past year.

CHOICES has continued to serve the Franklin County community throughout the pandemic, providing essential services while following all safety and health guidelines. We strongly urge the legislature and this committee to fully support domestic violence programs by increasing the

domestic violence survivor services budget line item from \$1 million to \$5 million per FY. Ohio's domestic violence programs and communities are relying on your support to keep families safe.

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CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence