



**Interested Party testimony submitted to the
Ohio Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
House Bill 110
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Chair Cross, Ranking Member Howse, and Members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 110. As Ohio's statewide coalition, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) advocates for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services for survivors and empowers communities to prevent sexual violence.

Established in 2014, the Rape Crisis Center line item was created to address the deficit of rape crisis services for victims of sexual assault in Ohio. Prior to creation of this line item, Ohioans in just 42 counties had access to rape crisis centers. Recognizing this disparity, OAESV worked closely with the Ohio Attorney General and numerous legislators establish a non-restrictive state funding stream to achieve expansion. The impact was swift and powerful – in the first-year of distribution, counties receiving services jumped to 51, and have incrementally increased since that time.

Today 34 rape crisis programs extend their home county borders to provide services to survivors in 77 counties. The Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence provides services in the remaining 11. While we have seen much greater availability of services since the line item was established, survivors in Clermont, Coshocton, Darke, Fayette, Jackson, Lawrence, Logan, Marion, Miami, Pickaway, Ross, Shelby and Union counties still lack access to a rape crisis center.

Unfortunately, 1 in 4 woman and 1 in 6 men are sexual violence victims before the age of 18. Since the legislature prioritized this public health crisis in 2014 through creation of the Rape Crisis Center Fund, state support has sustained services amid devastating federal cuts, even as we have seen major increases in sexual violence and survivors seeking services. This was especially true in 2020 when demand for services grew exponentially.

For example (in addition to prevention, counseling, legal services, and hotline calls):

- In **all of 2019**, rape crisis centers provided direct advocacy to **19,147 survivors**.
- In the first **9 months of 2020**, rape crisis centers provided direct advocacy to **23,689 survivors**.

2020 was a difficult year for all of us, and it was an extremely challenging year for Ohio's rape crisis centers, who received more than \$8 million in Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) cuts, while simultaneously facing a 34% monthly increase¹ in hotline calls and a 50% monthly increase in survivors accessing advocacy during the pandemic. **Unfortunately, Covid and VOCA cuts transformed 2020 Rape Crisis Center line item disbursements from a tool for expansion to the sustaining funding source that kept rape crisis centers open and survivor services available amid financial catastrophe.**

Because of the federal cuts, rape crisis programs have been forced to make extremely difficult decisions to lay off staff and cut services. Further, we have been told to prepare for an additional 34% reduction in VOCA funds this year.

I have to reiterate that sexual violence impacts 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men before they reach adulthood. Therefore, Rape Crisis Services are designed and regulated to provide comprehensive services to victims of **one of the most commonly occurring crimes in Ohio and the nation**. I want to specify the very unique and specific services RCCs provide that will be reduced or lost if financial conditions remain the same:

Rape Crisis Centers provide paid or volunteer hospital advocates to accompany survivors during their forensic medical examination – programs provide rigorous training and ethics standards, and work with county systems to make sure that a rape crisis advocate arrives at the hospital after a survivor has reported for medical treatment after a sexual assault. This person provides support for the survivor, and provides connection to rape crisis advocacy for future healing and system navigation. This has continued with innovation amid the pandemic with virtual tools. No other agencies provide hospital advocacy – which has bridged the gap between law enforcement, prosecution, civil systems, mental health treatment access, and survivor healing.

Rape Crisis Centers also provide trained victim advocates to accompany survivors in court hearings and other legal system operations, to connect survivors with legal representation when needed, and assist in finding resources. Advocates also connect survivors to support groups, and some programs provide free counseling. Rape Crisis Centers work with CDC programs to provide prevention education and collaboration among systems. OAESV works with member programs to provide prevention education in schools, government agencies, and communities. We manage the Changing Campus Culture Initiative through the Ohio Department of Higher Education, and work to eliminate sexual violence across systems.

Rape Crisis programs are the least funded victim service providers in the Nation as a whole – programs in Ohio, like their peers nationally, qualify for less federal funding than programs serving other types

¹ In the first 9 months of 2020, GRF recipients provided advocacy to 23% more survivors than they did in the entirety of 2019.

of crime. As federal funding accounts for as much as 60% of rape crisis budgets, this disparity rings heavy on services.

The legislature included a sizeable increase to the Rape Crisis Center Line Item in the previous budget, bringing the line item to \$4.4 million each fiscal year for rape crisis centers. I'd like to thank the members of this committee that supported this increase, without which the impact of 2020 would have been far more catastrophic.

As reliance must shift from VOCA funding, we respectfully urge this Committee and the Ohio House to support **an increase to the Rape Crisis Center line item to \$10 million** each fiscal year, allowing centers to continue to address the needs of survivors of sexual assault. This increase would help to offset additional federal cuts and support salaries and ancillary costs for additional advocacy in unserved counties and to meet the escalating demand² for services in counties with existing programs.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time and am available via email at rbeltre@oacsv.org.

² Though the number of survivors served statewide has increased 27% since 2015, in many rural counties, the reality is much more severe. In Warren County, for example, ARCS Shelter has experienced an increase of over 100% since 2015.