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**Senate Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony for HB 254
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Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and Senate Judiciary Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for HB 254. As Ohio's federally designated domestic violence coalition, the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) advances the principle that all people have the right to an oppression and violence-free life and advocates for changes in our economic, social and political systems to empower communities statewide to prevent domestic violence. ODVN represents 76 local domestic violence organizations across the state. In 2021, ODVN programs sheltered more than 9,118 survivors, including 3,965 children, and provided 80,706 survivors and children with services.¹

ODVN has been gathering data and reporting on domestic violence related fatalities in Ohio for the past 7 years. Because they are collected through media reports and our local programs, we do not believe that we have a complete count.

The data from our 7th annual fatality report was collected from July 1st, 2021, through June 30th, 2022. After a spike in fatality numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw a downward trend in fatalities in this reporting period. However, we are not to pre-pandemic levels, with only a 17% decrease from last year's record high report.² The most disturbing finding from our report was that 22 children and babies were killed, **the most since our coalition began reporting 7 years ago**. 16 victims were less than 10-years-old, including 6 babies who were under 1 year old. The youngest victim was 1 day old, who died from a gunshot wound a day after being delivered. The shooting was witnessed by the victim's 4-year-old sister.

Seventeen of the murdered children were killed by their fathers and family annihilation occurred in at least 3 cases. One media report from Lorain County stated that the suspect killed the family dog, his wife, Heidi, and their two sons, Garrett and Grant who were 9 and 6 years old, before taking his own life. In Fairfield County, it was reported that Kiara was in the process of divorcing her husband when he murdered her, their two sons who were 5 and 2 years old, and himself. For the cases where children survived, 35% of them witnessed their parent's murder.³

¹ For calendar year 2021. [ODVNFactSheet June2022](#). Accessed November 2022.

² For more information and statistics from ODVN's yearly fatality report, please visit: [ODVN FatalityReport 2021-2022.pdf](#)

³ Ibid.

Looking at the data trends from this report, we are concerned with the high levels of gun violence. **Gun violence as the manner of death made up 91% of the victim fatalities**, which was a slight increase this reporting period.⁴ In 42% of these cases, the perpetrator also killed themselves with a gun. While no law enforcement officers lost their lives responding to domestic violence incidents in the past year, they were involved in at least 3 cases where they shot the perpetrator, subsequently saving the lives of the victims in each case. Since ODVN began reporting, 10 law enforcement officers were killed responding to a domestic violence incident.⁵

Again, this is all information gathered through media reports, our local programs, and occasionally through police reports. What don't we know? We have no reliable race or ethnicity data. We do not know if any of these perpetrators or victims were experiencing mental health struggles, medical conditions, addiction, job loss, evictions, or were seeking treatment or services. We do not know how many of the victims had prior protection orders, child welfare, or family court involvement. We do not know if the children in the homes were reporting any difficulties or showing any signs of hardship in school. We do not know why the criminal justice system responded as it did in the cases where we knew of their involvement. We do not have a full picture of any of these situations. We ultimately believe that we are not even capturing all the domestic violence related fatalities each year.

Without that information, we as a state and each local community are unable to fully explore system responses. We are unable to explore where our shortcomings are, and how we can improve the way we support domestic violence adult and child victims. We are also unable to explore systemic responses to abusers. The missing information is critical to enact better community and state responses to prevent domestic violence related fatalities.

HB 254 begins a conversation about how to address this and we are eager to continue the conversation to improve domestic violence data collection and response. While the bill does not require local communities to collect information about DV homicides, it could improve the way we collect the information. HB 254 will create confidential spaces and committees to review fatalities and the system responses to those fatalities and develop recommendations for improvement at the local and state level.

On behalf of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network and our 76 member programs, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak about domestic violence fatalities in Ohio. We need HB 254 to improve our understanding of the domestic violence fatalities that are occurring and how our systems and communities can prevent future loss of life.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For more information on ODVN's past fatality reports from 2015 to 2022, please visit [Reports & Fact Sheets - Ohio Domestic Violence Network \(odvn.org\)](https://odvn.org/reports-and-fact-sheets)