

Susan Nixon Stoughton
Executive Director
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Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 93

Chair Gavarone, Vice-Chair O'Brien, and Ranking Member Maharath. and members of the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee, my name is Susan Nixon Stoughton and I am the Executive Director of The Lighthouse, Inc. We are the only domestic violence shelter serving Fairfield County, located in Lancaster, Ohio and have a long history serving victims of domestic violence since 1980. I am writing in support of House Bill 93, expanding the Safe at Home program allowing program participants to purchase property while maintaining their confidentiality.

Prior to joining The Lighthouse in July, 2018, I have spent over 25-years working in non-profit. My time spent with the American Red Cross of Fairfield and Hocking Counties, FairHoPe Hospice and United Way of Fairfield County all have aligned nicely with the mission of The Lighthouse. In the nearly three-years that I have been serving victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. Privacy and even secrecy are considered a crucial component of a victim's safety. This is why my shelter location is still confidential - survivor privacy is critical to their safety.

In this age of technology, it has become more difficult than ever for survivors to limit the sharing of their personal information. In less than a second or two, with an internet search on the Fairfield County Auditor's site, and a victim's location is revealed. Some survivors are so fearful of someone finding them that they choose to be homeless, or couch surf in order to not have to sign a lease for fear of being located. This has, and will, prevent many survivors from purchasing homes fearing that a stalker or abuser whom they have fled will be able to find them.

Regardless of laws attempting to protect survivor privacy, sensitive information can be exposed. This leaves survivors in danger, unwilling to report abuse and/or feeling like they cannot purchase a home. I encourage you to please expand the Safe at Home program and allow those trying to avoid re-victimization to rebuild their lives, and protect themselves and their children, with less concern of coming in contact with their past abuser.

Thank you.