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Kasey Holderbaum, Health and Disability Project Coordinator
Ohio Domestic Violence Network
House Criminal Justice Committee
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Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

My name is Kasey Holderbaum and I am the Health and Disability Project Coordinator for the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) is Ohio's federally designated domestic violence coalition, representing 76 local domestic violence organizations throughout the state. In calendar year 2022, ODVN programs sheltered 9,886 survivors (approximately 5,594 adults and 4,292 children) and provided nearly 73,000 survivors and their children with housing, legal advocacy, and other supportive services.¹

Based on our direct service and support of direct service providers across the state of Ohio, we support House Bill 161.

According to a national Institute of Justice report, 40 to 45% of women in abusive relationships are sexually assaulted by their abusive partner, and over half of those women were sexually assaulted multiple times.² This form of intimate partner sexual assault is more likely to cause physical injury than sexual assault perpetrated by non-intimate partners.³ Women who are sexually assaulted by their violent partner are at a greater risk for homicide.⁴ Despite this reality, married women in Ohio have less legal protection from rape than unmarried women. Indeed, current law serves as a disincentive for women to enter into marriage, knowing that they will lose legal protection if their spouse decides to be violent.

¹ The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) surveyed its 76 member programs January 5 to 27, 2023 about the prevalence of domestic violence. A total of 74 programs responded, a 97% response rate.

² Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence*. Findings from the national violence against women survey (NCJ 181867). July 2000. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

³ *Id.*

⁴ McFarlane, J. & Malecha, A. *Sexual Assault Among Intimates: Frequency, Consequences & Treatments*. October 2005. (NCJ 211678). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

Women who are sexually abused by intimate partners suffer higher rates of depression than those who are sexually assaulted by a non-intimate partner or who are physically but not sexually abused by their intimate partner.⁵ By removing the spousal rape exceptions, HB 161 ensures that all victims of rape and sex offenses in Ohio have equal access to the law and the ability to testify about their traumatic experiences, regardless of their marital status.

We would like to thank Representative Hillyer and Representative Miranda for their leadership and commitment to survivors of sexual violence. Our domestic violence programs across the state work with victims of sexual abuse every day. It is for these adult and child victims that we welcome and support measures like HB 161 that remove barriers to achieve an oppression and violence free life. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.

⁵ Bergen, R. (2006). *Marital Rape: New Research and Directions*. Harrisburg, PA: VAWnet, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence/Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Retrieved May 25, 2021, from: <http://www.vawnet.org>.