



The Ohio Chapter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) is submitting this letter of support for H.B. No. 161, sponsored by Representative Miranda, Representative Hilyer, and Representative Williams.

Ohio remains one of a handful of states that allow legal loopholes for spousal sexual violence. When passed, H.B. No. 161 will close that loophole and permit a person to testify against the person's spouse in a prosecution for any of the offenses detailed in the legislation.

As forensic nurses familiar with the negative acute and long-term health consequences of sexual violence, we applaud efforts to close this loophole. Patients experience negative health consequences regardless of the relationship with an offender. Access to medical, legal, and community support options that contribute to positive long term health outcomes need to be available for all victims.

The IAFN is a global organization of forensic nurses working alongside other professionals who support and complement the work of forensic nursing. The IAFN has approximately 6,000 members, including more than 200 nurses in Ohio. Forensic nurses are registered nurses or advanced practice nurses who received education and expert training to provide specialized care for people experiencing acute and long-term health consequences associated with victimization or violence and have unmet evidentiary needs relative to having been victimized or accused of victimization. Forensic nurses provide care within the intersecting systems of healthcare, community and legal environments for early identification of patients at risk of victimization or perpetration of violence.

A primary goal of forensic nursing programs is to raise public awareness that violence is a public health issue impacting healthcare systems and communities worldwide. To that end, forensic nurses promote interventions that prevent or confront the causes of violence and strengthen the health care response to those affected by violence.

Sexual violence has negative acute and long-term health-impacts on patients.¹⁻⁶ Nursing professionals are ethically bound to promote the health, welfare, and safety of all people. Using the art and science of nursing, forensic science and public health, forensic nurses are uniquely qualified to reduce the negative sequelae of violence through assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, implementation of treatment plans, and evaluating the effectiveness of our care for persons of all ages.

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 10-14% of married women will experience rape by their partners. Of those sexual abuse victims, 18% of female marital rape survivors report their children witnessed the assault.⁷ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adverse childhood experiences such as witnessing violence are more likely to have physical, mental, and behavioral problems throughout a person's lifetime.⁸



H.B. 161 acknowledges and addresses the individual, interpersonal, and community level outcomes associated with marital rape and seeks to protect our future generations from the negative immediate and long-term health outcomes associated with witnessing violence.

The Ohio Chapter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses is thankful to the sponsors, Representative Miranda and Representative Hilyer, as well as co-sponsor Representative Williams. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of passing H.B. 161. Please contact the Ohio chapter of IAFN at gov@ohioiafn.org if we can be of further assistance in passing this important bill.

References

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