



Proponent Testimony on House Bill 33
Finance Subcommittee on Public Safety
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Chair Miller, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Public Safety, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33. 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.

The Rape Crisis Center line item was established in 2014 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 center services. Recognizing this disparity, OAESV worked closely with the Ohio Attorney General and numerous legislators to establish a non-restrictive state funding stream to achieve expansion. In the first-year of distribution, counties receiving services jumped to 51, and have incrementally increased ever since.

Today 36 rape crisis programs extend their home county borders to provide services to survivors in 78 counties. OAESV provides stopgap services in the remaining 10 counties. While we have seen much greater availability of services since the line item was established, more work is needed to ensure that all survivors have access to support services close to home.

Unfortunately, sexual violence broadly impacts our population: over half of women and nearly 1 in 4 men will experience sexual violence in their lifetime.¹ Rape Crisis Centers provide essential, life-saving services to address this public health crisis in our local communities. Rape Crisis Centers provide paid or volunteer hospital advocates to accompany survivors during their forensic medical examination. Programs provide rigorous training and ethical standards to advocates, 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 ongoing advocacy support for future healing, and system navigation. No other agencies provide hospital advocacy – which has bridged the gap between survivors and law enforcement, prosecution, civil systems, and mental health treatment access.

¹ Basile, K. C., Smith, S. G., Kresnow, M. J., Khatiwada, S., & Leemis, R. W. (2022). The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey: 2016/2017 report on sexual violence. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs/nisvsreportonsexualviolence.pdf>

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. While response services are critical areas of our programming, so too is prevention education. Rape Crisis Centers work with local stakeholders to provide prevention education and collaboration across systems to a wide variety of audiences with the goal of stopping sexual violence before it begins. OAESV works with our member programs to provide prevention education in schools, government agencies, and communities.

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 of crime victims. 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 \$10 million and \$7.4 million for respective first and second fiscal years for rape crisis centers. I would like to thank the members of this Subcommittee that supported this increase. State funding has been integral in sustaining services amid devastating federal cuts as we continue to see major increases in the number of survivors seeking more complex services.

The past three years have been difficult for all of us, and it was an extremely challenging period for Ohio's Rape Crisis Centers. Between 2018 and 2020, there was a 67% drop in Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds awarded to Ohio, from \$117 million to \$58 million. In 2021, the amount awarded to Ohio was further reduced to \$36 million. Hundreds of other agencies, in addition to Rape Crisis Centers, rely on VOCA funding in Ohio. Last year, a survey of our member programs revealed that 96% of programs experienced an increased demand for their services from 2021 to 2022. Staffing has also become a substantial barrier to service delivery for nearly all Rape Crisis Centers in our state, due to the lack of competitive salaries² and the high level of stress and burnout that occur when requests for services increase dramatically without adequate staffing to meet the need.

As reliance must shift from VOCA funding, we respectfully urge this Subcommittee and the Ohio House to support the \$15 million allocation for the Rape Crisis Center line item in the as-introduced version of the budget. The increase will help to offset additional federal cuts and support salaries and ancillary costs for additional advocacy in unserved counties and to meet the escalating demand³ 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 our team is available via email at publicpolicy@oaesv.org.

² The average salary for victim advocates in Ohio is \$24,000.

³ The number of survivors served statewide increased by 96% from 2020 to 2021. In all of 2019 and 2020, rape crisis centers responded to over 23,000 hotline calls each year. In 2021, this number nearly doubled – with just over 45,000 hotline calls to our member programs.