



174 E Long Street, Suite 200
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Phone: 614-781-9651
www.odvn.org

**Senate Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony for H.B. 161
April 17, 2024**

Maria York, Policy Director
Ohio Domestic Violence Network

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Maria York, and I am the Policy Director for the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for H.B. 161, long-awaited legislation that will finally remove exemptions to spousal rape offenses.

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) is Ohio's federally designated domestic violence membership coalition, with a network of 76 local domestic violence organizations throughout the state. In calendar year 2023, ODVN programs sheltered 9,707 survivors, including 3,743 children, and provided 97,531 survivors and their children with housing, legal advocacy, and other supportive services. Our domestic violence programs across the state work with victims of sexual abuse every day.

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

Research from the National Institute of Justice highlights the prevalence and severity of intimate partner sexual assault, with 40 to 45% of women in abusive relationships experiencing sexual assault at the hands of their partner, and over half of those women experiencing sexual assaults multiple times.¹ These assaults often result in repeated trauma² and increased risk of homicide.³ Despite this reality, married women in Ohio

¹ 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.

² *Id.*

³ McFarlane, J. & Malecha, A. *Sexual Assault Among Intimates: Frequency, Consequences & Treatments*. October 2005. (NCJ 211678). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

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.

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.⁴ 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. H.B. 161 passed out of the House with bipartisan and near unanimous support. We respectfully urge this Committee to advance it as quickly as possible to ensure that Ohio is no longer one of the minority states who fail to protect all victims of sexual violence. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.

⁴ 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>.