



Home of the Battered Women's Shelter and Rape Crisis Center
with services in Medina and Summit Counties

**House Criminal Justice Committee
Proponent Testimony for House Bill 161
Teresa Stafford, CEO
Battered Women's Shelter and Rape Crisis Center of Medina & Summit Counties
April 17, 2024**

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for this committee to support House Bill 161 and to eliminate the Spousal Rape Exception from the Ohio Revised Code. As the CEO of the Battered Women's Shelter and Rape Crisis Center of Medina & Summit Counties, I have witnessed the harrowing and enduring impact of spousal rape on survivors and their families. It is imperative that we take decisive action to rectify this injustice.

Spousal rape is a deeply distressing and pervasive issue that continues to undermine the safety, dignity, and well-being of countless individuals within our society. Despite significant progress in recognizing and addressing sexual violence, it is unconscionable that the legal system still lags behind when it comes to acknowledging and prosecuting rape within the confines of marriage.

Our organization provides a lifeline to survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, offering them a safe space to heal, receive support, and access essential resources. We have been confronted with the tragic reality that many survivors of spousal rape are left without the legal recourse and protection that victims of non-spousal rape receive. This glaring disparity in our legal system not only perpetuates the suffering of survivors but also sends a distressing message that the violation of consent is somehow less significant or excusable within the confines of marriage.

The legislation before you represent a critical step towards ensuring that all survivors of sexual assault, regardless of their relationship with the perpetrator, receive equal protection under the law. By closing the spousal rape loophole, we can send a powerful message that consent is a fundamental human right, and any violation of it will not be tolerated or excused.

Moreover, closing this loophole will not only provide survivors with the legal recourse they deserve but also serve as a deterrent against spousal rape. It will emphasize that marital status should never be a shield for perpetrators of sexual violence and that accountability will be enforced.

I urge you to consider the moral and ethical imperative of supporting this legislation. By taking action

Summit County
974 East Market St.
Akron, Ohio 44305

330-374-0740

www.hopeandhealingresources.org

Medina County
696 E. Washington St.
Medina, Ohio 44256

330-723-9610

to end the spousal rape loophole, we can make significant strides toward a society where consent is respected, survivors are supported, and justice is served. It is our collective responsibility to protect the most vulnerable among us and ensure that the law reflects our commitment to a just and equitable society.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I stand ready to provide any additional information or support needed to advance this legislation. Let us work together to ensure that the rights and dignity of all individuals are upheld, and that spousal rape becomes an injustice of the past.

Sincerely,

Teresa Stafford

Teresa Stafford, CEO

Battered Women's Shelter and Rape Crisis Center of Summit & Medina Counties

TeresaS@hope-healing.org