



Proponent Testimony on House Bill 96
House Finance Committee
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Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I represent the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV), a statewide coalition dedicated to promoting comprehensive responses for survivors and advancing the prevention of sexual violence.

Over the past decade, the General Assembly, the Attorney General, and the Governor have all affirmed the importance of providing Ohioans with access to essential rape crisis services. I want to thank you for your continuous advocacy and support for funding the programs that serve as a critical lifeline for survivors. House Bill 96 is a further step in strengthening these services, ensuring Ohioans receive the help they need and that our communities become safer. **The Rape Crisis Centers' Line Item has played a pivotal role in expanding services across Ohio, and we ask for your continued support to maintain the funding level at the amount in the Governor's proposed budget.¹**

The Rape Crisis Centers' Line Item was created in 2013 to address the urgent need for sexual assault services in Ohio. Before this, only 42 counties had access to rape crisis programs. Today, 36 rape crisis programs extend their reach to 78 counties, helping thousands of survivors. OAESV steps in to provide stopgap services in the remaining 10 counties (Erie, Darke, Shelby, Miami, Logan, Pike, Pickaway, Fayette, Ross, Coshocton). We ensure that survivors receive the necessary support including survivor advocacy, housing support, and legal assistance.

Rape crisis center advocates work around the clock to support survivors. Our advocates respond all day, every day to hospitals throughout the state when a survivor reports for medical treatment after a sexual assault. These advocates offer direct care, connect survivors to ongoing services, and explain their rights as victims of crime. No other agencies provide 24/7 hospital response for sexual assault forensic exams, which bridges the gap between survivors and law enforcement, prosecution, and mental health treatment. Rape crisis centers also operate 24/7 hotlines that allow Ohioans immediate access to trained advocates. **Last year, hotlines served an estimated 40,000 people statewide.** Additional rape crisis services include accompaniment

¹ For FY26-27: \$15 million per year for a total of \$30 million.

to law enforcement and courts, education about crime victims' rights, and assistance with navigating local resources. Many centers offer counseling and support groups, as well as housing services and other specialized programs to meet the evolving needs of survivors. **Rape crisis centers are the only organizations in Ohio that specialize in the unique needs of sexual assault survivors.**

Sexual violence broadly impacts our population: over half of women and nearly 1 in 4 men will experience contact sexual violence in their lifetime.² Whether you are aware of it or not, you likely know someone—family, friends, or colleagues—who has been affected. Sexual violence is a grave violation that deeply impacts the body, mind, and life of the victim. Survivors of all ages require services in the immediate aftermath of such a trauma. We also see survivors wait years, even decades, to seek our services for ongoing support. Regardless of when they come forward, survivors deserve access to comprehensive advocacy services.

Studies have shown that advocates truly make a difference in the lives of survivors.³ I encourage you to think back to a time when you were most afraid or embarrassed to share something vulnerable with another person. Their response likely shaped how you were able to move forward. Advocates provide that kind of support for survivors. They are not there to investigate crimes or gather evidence but to focus solely on the survivor's needs. This compassionate, survivor-centered approach significantly affects the healing process, enabling survivors to remain connected to criminal justice proceedings, retain housing and employment, and cope with the trauma. In some cases, service availability can make the difference between life or death for a survivor.

Despite the immense impact of sexual violence, rape crisis programs are the least funded victim services across the country – programs in Ohio, like their peers nationally, qualify for less federal funding than programs serving other types of crime victims. The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding remains the primary federal funding stream that supports services for crime victims in Ohio. VOCA was created by Congress in 1984 to provide grants to state and local programs that assist victims of crime. Its Fund is derived entirely from fines and penalties paid by federal criminal offenders, not taxpayer revenues. In Ohio, these funds support over 330 agencies. While VOCA dollars expanded access to crime victims' services nationwide, there has been a sharp decline in funding in recent years. **Between fiscal years 2018 and 2024, there was a 77% reduction in Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds awarded to the State of Ohio, from \$117 million to \$26 million.**

² 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>

³ Campbell R. (2006). Rape survivors' experiences with the legal and medical systems: do rape victim advocates make a difference? *Violence against women*, 12(1), 30–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801205277539>

Congress passed the VOCA Fix Act in 2021, directing deposits from deferred prosecutions and non-prosecution agreements to the Crime Victims Fund in an attempt to increase deposits to the Fund in the long term. To date, the VOCA Fix has increased money in the Fund. However, it is not yet sufficient to fully restore the health of the Fund, nor has it fixed the shrinking deposits into our state. Ohio's rape crisis programs continue to suffer from limited resources. This funding stream will not be restored quickly and may take additional years and further strategies enacted by Congress to recover.

State funding is essential to sustain Ohio's rape crisis programs, particularly in the face of drastic federal cuts. These funds allow us to continue supporting survivors, even as the demand for more complex services grows. In FY 2024, 58% of staff at rape crisis centers were funded in part through the Line Item, which enabled advocates to provide 500 hours of legal advocacy each week and serve over 30,000 survivors of sexual violence in our local centers. This funding also supported prevention education efforts that reached 95,000 Ohioans last year. Rape crisis programs are leading the effort to reduce sexual violence in our state and state funding is a critical support in preventing violence before it occurs.

We respectfully ask that you maintain the \$15 million per year allocation for the Rape Crisis Centers' line item in the budget, which is the same level of funding allocated to the Line Item in the previous budget. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.