

Opponent Testimony on House Bill 172

House Health Committee

Beth E. Malchus Stafa, Concerned Longtime Citizen of the Great State of Ohio: Advocate,

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Grandview Hts., Ohio

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Chairperson Jean Schmidt, Vice Chairperson Kellie Deeter, Ranking Member Anita Somani and Members of the House Health Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on House Bill 172.

National events involving sexual abuse of minors, and closer to my home, in August a rape of a three-year-old in my city impels me to be here this afternoon.

I am here to ask you to provide continued assurance that all Ohio children are protected against child abuse and neglect and that all survivors of child abuse and neglect are able to receive the mental, physical and spiritual care needed to heal. I have written often to my representative, my senator, and the governor on how Ohioans need to continue to create an Ohio where it is the HEART of it all. (Heart equaling to love.) I find this bill unloving and not living up to our slogan.

I believe House Bill 172 moves us back to where Ohio was twenty-three years ago. In 2002, the Ohio Sexual Assault Task Force created its first statewide plan for ending sexual assault in Ohio. Five regional public hearing and focus groups identified gaps in services. Survivors, Rape Crisis Centers, Advocates, Law Enforcements, Prosecution, Health Care, and Mental Health Care – Ohio citizens spoke bluntly and heartfully of their experiences. The report outlined critical recommendations for a comprehensive approach to prevention, crises intervention, and ensuring effective justice.

Since this 2002 legacy work, Ohio has made strides in implementing prevention strategies for child sexual abuse and teen dating violence; creating pediatric standards of care based on Trauma Informed Systems; creating competencies needed for counselors to work with children and adolescents, changing Law Enforcement investigations to include an understanding that perpetrators are most often care givers that the family trusts or with family members themselves; and our Ohio Legislators have changed our laws to hold offenders accountable and ensure that children victims have the care they needed.

House Bill 172 erases the progress Ohio has made in supporting our children and adolescents. The bill's proposal of parental consent for counseling undermines best practice standards of care, especially if the abuser is a parent or family member. It also contradicts what survivors asked for in 2002. I am all for adults holding each other responsible for protecting children from child abuse and sexual assault, and teen dating violence by reporting to authorities. I am all for teachers and coaches helping a child or adolescent get to a school counselor or school nurse.

Adults with clinical training and expertise are often the best supports for children experiencing abuse.

Cardinal Roger Mahoney said “Any society, any nation is judged on the basis of how it treats its weakest member: the last, the least the littlest.”

I am asking you to vote no on House Bill 172 and keep Ohio moving forward in best practices for child abuse and teen dating violence.

Sincerely,

Beth E. Malchus Stafa
Grandview Hts., Ohio

CC: Representative C. Allison Russo, Senator William P. DeMoro, Governor Mike DeWine, Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Ohio Domestic Violence Network