



Proponent Testimony on House Bill 447
House Judiciary Committee
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Hope and Healing Survivor Resource Center
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Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of House Bill 447. My name is Teresa Stafford Wright, and I serve as Chief Executive Officer of Hope and Healing Survivor Resource Center, the comprehensive domestic violence and rape crisis agency serving Summit and Medina Counties. Each year, our organization provides emergency shelter, crisis intervention, hospital accompaniment, court advocacy, therapy, and prevention education to 5,000 survivors and their children across the two-county region.

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of those survivors whose lives have been forever altered by violence, to urge this Committee to pass House Bill 447, which would modernize and increase Ohio's outdated caps on noneconomic damages and adjust them annually for inflation.

The True Cost of Violence

At Hope & Healing, we see the full continuum of harm every day. Survivors arrive at our shelter with nothing but the clothes they were wearing when they fled. Many cannot return to their homes, jobs, or schools because their safety has been compromised. Long after physical injuries heal, the emotional, psychological, and social wounds continue to shape their lives and their futures.

Why HB 447 Matters

Ohio's current cap on noneconomic damages, which has been unchanged for nearly two decades, sends a damaging message: that there is a ceiling to the value of a survivor's pain. Current limits not only fail to keep pace with inflation, but also fail to account for the nature of trauma itself. Sexual violence and domestic abuse are not just financial losses. They are profound violations of body, mind, and spirit.

Under current law, corporations, institutions, and individuals responsible for negligence or abuse can treat these caps as simply "the cost of doing business." That is not justice — it is a discount on human suffering. House Bill 447 proposes raising the cap to the greater of \$415,000 or three times

the economic loss, with a maximum of \$580,000 per plaintiff or \$830,000 per occurrence and provides for annual CPI adjustments to ensure the law remains relevant and fair.

The Survivors Behind the Statistics

At Hope & Healing, many of our clients experience ongoing mental health impacts, including PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Many must leave their jobs or educational programs due to trauma-related symptoms. Yet the civil justice system currently undervalues these profound noneconomic harms, limiting the ability of survivors to rebuild their lives.

Raising the noneconomic damage caps would be one concrete way for our legal system to affirm that message: that their pain matters, their healing matters, and their dignity cannot be capped.

A Step Toward Justice and Healing

Civil justice is a critical part of accountability. It not only compensates survivors but also deters future harm by holding wrongdoers responsible in a meaningful way. The current caps, unchanged for nearly twenty years, erode both justice and deterrence. By passing House Bill 447, you are saying that Ohio will no longer allow outdated financial limits to minimize the true cost of violence and trauma.

On behalf of the survivors, families, and communities we serve, I urge this Committee to affirm that justice must reflect both the economic and human realities of harm. Survivors deserve fairness in compensation for the harm they experienced.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I am available to answer any questions that the Committee may have at TeresaS@hope-healing.org.