



Proponent Testimony for HB 528

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Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence**

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 528.

My name is Emily Gemar, and I am writing on behalf of the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV). OAESV is Ohio's statewide coalition working to end sexual violence. We support rape crisis centers and community partners across the state that provide advocacy, prevention education, and direct services to survivors of sexual violence.

Sexual violence remains a significant public health and safety issue in Ohio and across the country. National data shows that approximately one in five women in the United States has experienced completed or attempted rape in their lifetime. Survivors often face long-term physical, emotional, and economic impacts because of this violence. Many perpetrators are also never held accountable through the criminal justice system, and survivors frequently encounter barriers to reporting or pursuing justice.

Under current Ohio law, rape is classified as a first-degree felony. In many cases, courts may impose a minimum prison term ranging from three to eleven years depending on the circumstances of the offense. This sentencing range reflects the serious nature of the crime, but it also means that the minimum sentence for rape in some cases can be as low as three years.

House Bill 528 seeks to address one specific form of rape—sexual conduct compelled by force or threat of force—by establishing a mandatory minimum prison term of at least seven years. The bill allows courts to impose minimum sentences of seven, eight, nine, ten, or eleven years for this category of offense. This approach aims to ensure a stronger baseline level of accountability in cases where force or threats of force are used.

Rape is a serious crime regardless of the specific circumstances under which it occurs. Survivors experience profound trauma whether an assault involves physical force, coercion, incapacitation, manipulation, or other forms of exploitation. For that reason, OAESV does not believe that one form of rape should be separated out from others in a way that could unintentionally suggest that some forms of rape are more serious than others.

At the same time, we recognize the importance of ensuring that sentencing for sexual violence reflects the severity of these crimes. Survivors deserve a legal system that holds offenders appropriately accountable and communicates clearly that sexual violence will not be tolerated.

Policies that strengthen accountability, when thoughtfully designed, can help reinforce survivor confidence in the legal system and affirm the seriousness of the harm caused by sexual violence.

For these reasons, OAESV appreciates the intent behind House Bill 528 to address sentencing for rape and ensure meaningful accountability for offenders. We encourage policymakers to continue examining Ohio's broader sentencing framework for sexually oriented offenses to ensure that all survivors receive equitable recognition of the harm they have experienced and that the legal system responds consistently and appropriately to these crimes.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am available to answer any questions at egemar@oaesv.org.