



Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 225
Senate Judiciary Committee
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 225. As Ohio's statewide coalition, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) advocates for comprehensive rape crisis services for survivors and empowers communities to prevent sexual violence.

Many of our rape crisis center advocates are certified *Safe at Home* application assistants, helping thousands of Ohio victims of rape, sexual battery, human trafficking, stalking, and domestic violence apply to the program for address confidentiality. We have seen survivors forced to move multiple times, withdraw from employment, and avoid accessing services or other facets of public life out of fear. These barriers perpetuate cycles of isolation and poverty that keep victims vulnerable. Since its inception, *Safe at Home* been a vital resource for survivors who qualify, allowing them to participate in everyday activities—like registering to vote, enrolling children in school, or obtaining a driver's license, without putting themselves at risk.

We strongly support SB 225, which would expand *Safe at Home* to help more victims of violent crime be eligible for address confidentiality. Many victims of violent crime or threats with deadly weapons continue to face danger, harassment, or retaliation after the initial crime, necessitating the protection of their personal information from attackers or abusers. Also, victims of domestic and/or sexual violence may report violent crimes that fall into the expanded eligibility proposed by the bill—but not the crime of rape, for instance, due its stigma or other factors—thereby protecting them and their families.

A significant amount of individuals who experience sexual assault, domestic violence, and related violent crimes, worry that the person who harmed them may try to harm them again, retaliate for reporting the crime, or try to re-establish contact. These concerns can include:

- Fear of physical harm or threats if they testify or cooperate with authorities.
- Harassment or stalking by the offender or the offender's associates.
- Psychological distress from seeing or hearing from the offender again.

These concerns are rational. Victims of violent crime may have experienced or witnessed retaliation in their communities or personal networks, and some do experience actual re-contact or intimidation after reporting. This fear can have a chilling effect on reporting future crimes to police and seeking medical care or rape crisis center services. Expanding eligibility and improving access through SB 225 means that more Ohioans can find safety and independence in the aftermath of a crime.

Safety should not depend on a survivor's ability to navigate bureaucracy or on the specific legal definition of their abuse. This bill is a practical, needed measure that acknowledges the lived experiences of survivors and gives them access to a safety planning tool to regain control over their lives. OAESV thanks Senator Manning for her sponsorship of this bill. I am available to answer questions at egemar@oaesv.org.