Ohio Domestic Violence Network
ODVN

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Senate Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony for S.B. 393
April 15, 2026

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Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Lisa DeGeeter, and I am the Senior Director for Policy and Prevention at the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. Thank you for the opportunity to provide support for S.B. 393, a bill that strengthens Ohio's criminal statutes to better protect minors from sexual exploitation.

ODVN strongly supports the bill's expansion of unlawful sexual conduct with a minor and gross sexual imposition to cover 16- and 17-year-olds when the offender is four or more years older. Ohio law has long recognized that age gaps between adults and adolescents create inherent power imbalances that undermine the capacity for meaningful consent. This bill extends that recognition to a group of young people who have been left without adequate protection.

ODVN respectfully recommends that the committee consider upgrading the penalty for unlawful sexual conduct with a minor when the offender is more than four but fewer than ten years older than the victim from a first-degree misdemeanor to a fifth-degree felony.
As introduced, an adult who is, for example, six years older than a 16-year-old victim faces only a misdemeanor. A misdemeanor charge in cases involving a meaningful age gap may not adequately reflect the seriousness of the conduct or the harm to the victim. An F5 designation in this range would preserve the close-in-age, or "Romeo and Juliet," exception for peers while ensuring that adults with a significant age advantage face felony-level accountability.

The bill's new minor-specific sexting provisions reflect a difficult but important reality: child sexual abuse material causes harm regardless of who created it. Peer-to-peer sharing of sexual images among minors can quickly become a vehicle for sextortion, harassment, and coercive control, including by abusive partners and ex-partners. ODVN appreciates that the bill's sexting provisions are carefully scoped to consensual exchanges and carry graduated penalties, with the most serious consequences reserved for repeat conduct.

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We recognize the tension in criminalizing conduct between young people What matters most to ODVN is that survivors, including young survivors whose images are shared without ongoing consent, have a legal framework that takes that harm seriously.

On behalf of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network, thank you Senators Timken and Manning for bringing forward legislation that strengthens protections for some of Ohio's most vulnerable young people.