Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 421
May 20, 2026
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Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence

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

My name is Emily Gemar and I am here on behalf of the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV), the coalition which represents and serves Ohio's rape crisis centers. OAESV initiates and advocates for survivor-centered public policy; provides expert training, technical assistance, and resources for providers and partners; and represents the service providers in your communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 421. OAESV also thanks Senator Manning and Senator Antonio for their leadership and diligent work on this bill.

At OAESV, we have worked with thousands of survivors, many of whom spent years—or even decades—deciding whether to disclose their abuse, report to authorities, or pursue accountability through the legal system. There are few things our team and our 32-member rape crisis programs know with more certainty than this: **healing and justice do not happen on a predictable timeline.** Trauma affects every survivor differently, and the law must recognize that reality. In fact, Ohio's 25-year criminal statute of limitations for rape already acknowledges that survivors often need significant time before seeking justice. The current civil statute of limitations for victims who are raped as adults fails to provide the same consideration.

Victims of sexual violence pursue justice in different ways. For some, that means engaging with the criminal legal system. For others, it may involve reporting misconduct within institutions such as schools, workplaces, or faith communities. Many survivors (try to) seek accountability through the civil legal system because it provides a pathway to recognition and accountability that they can initiate themselves. Yet too often in Ohio, survivors lose the opportunity to pursue civil action in the current one-year period before they are emotionally, mentally, or financially prepared to come forward.

Delayed disclosure is common for many reasons. It is well-established that trauma can impair memory formation, emotional regulation, and disclosure. Many survivors do not fully recognize or understand the extent of their victimization until years later, after they have had time to process what occurred and regain a sense of safety and stability. Perpetrators also frequently use fear, manipulation, shame, intimidation, and coercion to silence victims and convince them

that what happened was somehow their fault. In cases where survivors and perpetrators share family, social, educational, or workplace connections, survivors may also fear retaliation, isolation, or disbelief from their communities. Witnesses themselves may be unwilling to cooperate until years later, when they have gained independence or when social pressures diminish.

Over the last decade, Ohio has taken meaningful steps to improve responses to sexual violence, including investments in rape kit testing, extending the criminal SOL for rape, and expanding crime victims' rights. We are working to fix the system, but we need laws that will support our investment in creating an Ohio where victims can meaningfully seek justice and hold offenders accountable. Extending the civil statute of limitations to five years is a logical continuation of those efforts. It also reflects what the law has long recognized: sexual violence is a uniquely traumatic offense. Survivors commonly take years to process the assault, seek safety, or become emotionally ready to seek legal recourse. Applying the same one-year limitations period used for other assault and battery claims fails to account for the distinctive and well-documented effects of sexual violence.

Importantly, Senate Bill 421 does not alter evidentiary standards or eliminate due process protections. It simply provides survivors with a more reasonable timeline, as now exists in many states, to pursue civil accountability after experiencing profound trauma.

Survivors deserve justice and healing no matter how long it takes. We urge this committee to favorably report on S.B. 421. I'm available to answer any questions you might have.