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Senate Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony: Senate Bill 421
May 20, 2026

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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 proponent testimony on Senate Bill 421, a bill that meaningfully recognizes the complexity of victim behavior and acknowledges that time is essential to recovery.

For more than 120 years, Cleveland Legal Aid has been a vehicle for promoting justice throughout Northeast Ohio. Working alongside law enforcement, courts, advocates, and the community, we use the power of the law to improve safety and expand access to justice for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Through our Family Law Practice, Cleveland Legal Aid has represented thousands of survivors and impacted tens of thousands more through outreach and advocacy.

The thoughtful and responsible expansion of the period for bringing a civil action is a critical continuation of these efforts. Increasing the limitation period from one year to five years is not merely a procedural change—it is a necessary recognition of how trauma affects victims and survivors. Current law provides only a narrow window, despite the well-documented reality that many individuals don't come forward within that timeframe. Survivors often delay disclosure due to fear, shame, ongoing coercion, or the psychological effects of the abuse itself. These responses can be counterintuitive; victims may remain silent, minimize what occurred, or require significant time before they are able to process and act on their experience. A one-year limitation period does not account for these realities and, in many cases, closes the courthouse doors before a survivor has any meaningful opportunity to seek relief. Expanding the timeframe to five years helps fill this critical gap and ensures that survivors are given a fair and realistic opportunity to pursue protection and accountability through the civil justice system.

Senate Bill 421 represents a measured and necessary step toward aligning our laws with the lived realities of victims and survivors. Extending the time to bring a civil action does not create new claims, it merely ensures that existing rights can be meaningfully exercised. By adopting this expansion, the legislature is affirming its commitment to

both justice and safety, recognizing that recovery and readiness cannot be confined to an arbitrary timeline. Cleveland Legal Aid encourages the Committee's favorable consideration of the bill.