Ohio Victim Witness ASSOCIATION

90 Northwoods Blvd, Suite B-6
Columbus, OH 43235
614-787-9000 | info@ovwa.org
ovwa.org

Senate Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 421
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Elyse McConnell, Executive Director

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony for Senate Bill 421 today. My name is Elyse McConnell, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Victim Witness Association. OVWA represents more than 650 victim advocates and allied professionals working across prosecutors' offices, nonprofit organizations, law enforcement agencies, healthcare systems, and other victim-serving organizations throughout Ohio. Rather than specializing in one type of crime victimization, many of our members serve any victim of crime at the felony or misdemeanor level.

Victim advocates play an essential role in the justice system. They walk alongside victims as they pursue justice, healing, safety, and restitution. Through that work, our members see firsthand the many barriers survivors face when deciding whether to report abuse or seek accountability.

Ohio's current civil statute of limitations for sex crimes is extremely limited, allowing adult survivors only one year to pursue civil action. Senate Bill 421 would extend that timeframe to five years. This is a modest but meaningful change that brings Ohio more in line with the realities survivors face. This bill takes a significant step forward in supporting survivors and recognizing the profound impact trauma can have on victims and their ability to seek justice. It acknowledges the reality that survivors often need time before they are emotionally, mentally, or financially prepared to come forward.

Our members regularly work with survivors who have decided to work with law enforcement, believing they are doing everything possible to pursue justice against their abuser. Many victims do not realize that while a criminal investigation or prosecution is ongoing, a separate one-year clock is running on their ability to pursue a civil claim. By the time the criminal process concludes—or even meaningfully progresses—survivors may learn that the statute of limitations has already expired, leaving them without any opportunity to seek civil accountability. For many, this is a devastating and deeply unfair outcome after they have already spent months or years participating in an incredibly difficult process. Extending the civil statute of limitations helps ensure that victims are not penalized for engaging with the criminal justice system in good faith.

The impacts of sexual violence can be profound and enduring. Extending the civil statute of limitations to five years reflects a more realistic understanding of how trauma affects victims and their ability to seek justice. It ensures survivors are not unintentionally shut out of the civil legal system while doing what we ask of them in the criminal process. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to pass Senate Bill 421.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony, and we thank Senators Nathan Manning and Nickie Antonio for sponsoring this legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.