Proponent Testimony for SB 421: Civil Action for Sex Offenses
Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
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Cleveland Rape Crisis Center
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for considering testimony on Senate Bill 421, to extend the statute of limitations for survivors of sexual violence to pursue civil legal action.

My name is Andrew DeFratis, Senior Director of Public Affairs with Cleveland Rape Crisis Center. Cleveland Rape Crisis Center is one of the first, largest, and highest-impact rape crisis centers in the country. Our mission is to support all survivors of rape and sexual abuse, promote healing and prevention, and advocate for social change. That support can take the form of a 24-hour crisis hotline, hospital and criminal justice advocacy, case management, individual counseling, and more.

Currently, adult survivors of sexual violence who were harmed as adults have only one year from the date of assault to file a civil lawsuit against the perpetrator. Senate Bill 421 would extend that period to five years, allowing more survivors the time to navigate their healing while preserving the option to pursue civil legal remedies if that is what they choose.

Here's why that added time is important: in 2025, our crisis hotline provided a believing ear to more than 3,700 calls, texts, and chats from survivors. Calls that sometimes, but not always, dispatched an advocate to a police station or the hospital to be by that survivor's side during a police report or a forensic exam. But in many cases, our hotline specialist may be the first person that survivor has ever opened up to about their experience; the first time they have been able to speak the truth out loud and know they'll be believed.

For many different reasons, the average period before a survivor reaches out to us since the harm occurred is more than five years.

Through our work with survivors, we know there are many different reasons why someone may not disclose, come forward, or report the abuse sooner – chief among them is fear: fear of not being believed, fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, and fear of who will find out and what that could mean among their peers, within their family, or in their community.

Some survivors are carrying that trauma by themselves for decades.

Every survivor's healing journey is different, and decisions about whether or not to engage with the legal system are deeply personal.

A system that is rarely trauma-informed and frequently paints a complicated picture for survivors: according to RAINN, for every 1,000 sexual assaults reported, only 25 perpetrators are incarcerated. And because as many as 93% of perpetrators are known to the survivor, many are forced to continue living, working, worshipping, studying, or raising families in the same communities as the person who harmed them.

While a civil action cannot undo the trauma of sexual violence, it can provide survivors with another avenue for accountability, acknowledgement, and justice. For some survivors, pursuing a civil claim may help recover costs associated with that trauma, including counseling, medical care, or lost income. For others, simply having the ability to make that choice on their own timeline can itself be meaningful.

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center strongly supports Senate Bill 421 because it recognizes the realities of trauma and removes an unnecessarily short barrier to justice for adult survivors of sexual violence in Ohio. Empowering survivors is supporting survivors.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this legislation and respectfully encourage the General Assembly to prioritize its passage. I would be happy to address questions by email at andrewd@clevelandrcc.org.

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