Senate Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony - Senate Bill 421
YWCA of Greater Cleveland
May 20th, 2026

Thank you, Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, I am Helen Forbes Fields, President and CEO of the YWCA of Greater Cleveland. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 421, legislation that would change the civil statute of limitations for sexual offenses.

Sexual assault is a deeply traumatic experience that can have lasting physical, emotional, and psychological impacts on survivors. For many individuals, healing from that trauma requires significant time, support, and access to medical or mental health services. The trauma associated with sexual violence often delays reporting, making this legislation critically important. A one-year statute of limitations does not provide sufficient time for survivors to process their experiences and determine whether they are prepared to pursue legal action.

For over 150 years, the YWCA of Greater Cleveland's mission has been to support and empower women. We currently operate the Norma Herr Women's Shelter in Cuyahoga County where we shelter roughly 250 women each night, operate two permanent supportive housing locations and serve women and their families at risk of homelessness in our early learning center. We serve and stand with women through some of the greatest trials and hardships of their lives.

Through our work with survivors and advocates across Northeast Ohio, we recognize that many individuals are not ready to come forward before the current civil statute of limitations expires. As a result, survivors are denied the opportunity to seek accountability and justice through the current legal framework. Extending the statute of limitations to five years recognizes the long-term impacts of trauma and helps ensure survivors are not shut out of the legal system before they are ready and able to act.

For survivors, the decision to file a civil lawsuit is deeply personal and significant. Extending the civil statute of limitations sends a strong message that Ohio is committed to supporting pathways toward justice and healing for survivors.

Thank you, Chair, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 421. The YWCA of Greater Cleveland respectfully urges your favorable consideration of this legislation.