

**MISSION**

YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

**Proponent testimony submitted to the  
Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee  
Sub. Senate Bill 41  
Deborah Stoll, *Director*  
HOPE Center – YWCA of Northwest Ohio**

Chair Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Sub. Senate Bill 41. The YWCA of Northwest Ohio seeks to eliminate racism and empower women, provides safe places for women and girls, builds strong women leaders, and advocates for women's rights and civil rights in Congress. As part of that overarching mission, I serve as Director to the YWCA of Northwest Ohio's HOPE Center, a rape crisis center serving survivors in Lucas and Fulton Counties. I want to thank Senator Ecklund for recognizing the important issue at stake and sponsoring SB 41, and thank the Chair for scheduling this important hearing.

The HOPE Center provides a variety of holistic services to persons in crisis after sexual violence, including medical accompaniment, legal advocacy, support groups, hotline responses, linkage to counseling, safety planning, and referral to shelter services. In 2017, the HOPE Center provided a total of 10,457 services to survivors. Since its inception in 1989, the YWCA HOPE Center has grounded its services on a foundation of confidentiality. Confidentiality enhances survivor safety, promotes survivors' feeling of stability and security in their communities, protects their dignity, and protects autonomy.

Research-based best practices in the rape crisis field dictate that without confidentiality, effective survivor services cannot exist. This principle has rang true throughout my career. Advocates are the only professionals purely dedicated to supporting survivors of domestic and sexual violence, stalking, and human trafficking. To best help survivors access resources, advocates and survivors must establish a trust-based professional relationship. When survivors can trust an advocate, they can share their full story in a way that allows advocates to comprehensively safety plan, connect survivors with appropriate law enforcement agencies, make referrals to appropriate medical providers for diagnosis and treatment, provide information for legal services, and engage in other holistic responses as appropriate.

Though the HOPE Center receives Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) funding, which requires full confidentiality subject to a small list of highly regulated exceptions (including if a state statute declines to extend privilege to advocate and victim communications), Ohio's current privilege pierces the shield of confidentiality we so carefully build for each of the survivors we serve. In my work, I have seen survivors decline services or minimize fact sharing when they find out that an advocate may be subpoenaed. Overall, survivors may not access services after finding out that confidentiality is not full-proof because they fear that sharing the full nature of their abuse or assault, as well as their personal information, will:

- jeopardize their personal safety, and the safety of their family, friends, and peers;
- impact their education, employment, or housing;
- allow for manipulation and further abuse by the perpetrator;
- lead to humiliation, blame, or rejection by community, family, or friends; and/or
- lead to repetitive retraumatization.

Because no Ohio crisis center has full confidentiality (under the current Ohio privilege statute), survivors must choose between possible forced disclosure and not receiving services at all. When survivors choose to risk forced disclosure and access services, their abusers are able to subpoena our advocates, knowing that there is no statutory defense against it. This creates a conflict not only for survivor trust and safety, but it also causes an agency conflict, as we have to juggle our obligations under the Violence Against Women Act funding stream and the Ohio Revised Code. This means that our center must spend significant time and resources working to quash subpoenas and prepare advocates for depositions and testimony in a manner that complies with VAWA's mandate that we put forth any and all legal barriers between our survivor's information and those who seek it without their consent. This takes a huge amount of time and resources away from the work we are funded for and specialized to do – provide rape crisis services to survivors in need of life-saving services.

Advocates around this county have made a commitment to confidentiality in its truest form. The majority of states and the federal government have recognized this commitment through the passage of advocate privilege legislation in said states, and the firming up of federal funding requirements to uphold the security of survivor information. Senate Bill 41 echoes the actions of other jurisdictions in its reinforcement of the importance of survivor confidentiality. It also lays out important professional training requirements that enhance advocate effectiveness and ensure that those with the privilege are qualified for the critical work they do and understand the boundaries and the privilege they hold.

I again thank this committee for considering this absolutely critical legislation and urge you to pass this bill not only through committee, but on the Senate floor.

Thank you for taking the time to review my testimony. I am happy to provide any additional information or answer any questions you may have. You may contact me at the YWCA of Northwest Ohio at [hope@ywcanwo.org](mailto:hope@ywcanwo.org), through my work cell phone at 419-266-2806 or at our 24 hour crisis number 866-557-7273.

Sincerely,



Deborah K. Stoll  
H.O.P.E. Center Director  
1018 Jefferson Avenue  
Toledo, OH 43604  
419-241-3235 x121  
[hope@ywcanwo.org](mailto:hope@ywcanwo.org)

**ywca**  
Eliminating Racism  
Empowering Women