



**Proponent testimony submitted to the
Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
Sub. Senate Bill 41
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COMPASS (Sexual Assault Education, Prevention & Support)**

Chair Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for reviewing my written testimony in support of Sub. Senate Bill 41. I am providing this written testimony in support of Sub. Senate Bill 41, not only on my own behalf, but on behalf of COMPASS, a Goodwill Industries affiliate agency that provides rape crisis advocacy, prevention, and education services. At COMPASS, we believe that community resources are crucial to the overall healing process. We therefore provide hotline advocacy, direct advocacy, medical accompaniment, and legal advocacy, in addition to our prevention education work across the communities we serve in Tuscarawas, Carroll, and Stark counties.

Any person, regardless of gender, race, income, or education, can find themselves facing the aftermath of a life-altering sex crime. Without any advanced warning or time for preparation, survivors must navigate a complicated web of systems and accept new responsibilities. The most glaring example is the role of victim in a criminal investigation and later prosecution, where a survivor of a horrific crime is now burdened with providing evidence, submitting testimony, and working with state employees in a system they may not understand. During this process, survivors often feel revictimized – as they are asked to share their story with numerous state actors and defense attorneys, all of whom have different objectives.

Throughout the criminal justice process, no person situated by the courts or provided by the state is there specifically to assist and support the survivor. Though many prosecutor-based advocates are wonderful professionals, their fundamental role is to serve as a contact between the prosecutor and the survivor. This relationship lasts during the criminal justice process, but does not provide the survivor with the long-term support, resource referrals, and case management that they so desperately need. Community-

based advocates fill this critical role, providing a trained professional at a federally-regulated agency for linkage to critical recovery resources.

COMPASS has provided this service since 1997. In our 21 years of advocacy experience, we have found that survivors often feel victimized both by the perpetrator and the legal system. Therefore, it is critical that survivors have community-based advocates, advocates who ideally have fully privileged communications. The need for privileged communications is clear when examining the specific services advocates provide:

- Personal support during hospital visits for rape evidence collection examinations
- Tailored referrals to counseling services, support groups, and other healing resources
- Making survivors aware of and assisting with applying for the Victims of Crime Compensation Program
- Facilitating communications between the survivor, police, and prosecutor
- Providing information about the criminal and civil justice processes to make survivors more comfortable with the steps and to help them understand why specific parties will ask certain questions
- Referrals to legal resources
- Case management designed to help the survivor access resources and fully participate in the justice process

Community-based advocates are trained based on guiding principles in this specialized field and findings from scientific research. To effectively assist and support survivors in healing, advocates must establish that they believe the survivor and can provide a truly confidential space. Findings on the impact of trauma on the brain supports our experiential findings that survivors who fear that their personal information may come out are often afraid for their safety, are worried that certain details will impact their employment security, are concerned that individuals lacking understanding of the dynamics of sexual violence will blame them, among other concerns. If allowed to speak to a truly confidential advocate, a survivor can work through these feelings and towards a more comfortable understanding of the criminal justice process before having to meet with police officers or prosecutors. This allows for a more informed survivor who can work with the criminal justice system with confidence and awareness.

Though Ohio's rape crisis services have grown significantly in the past several years, due in part to increased federal funding and the Rape Crisis Centers Fund line item in the Ohio budget, the demand for services has also increased as survivors become aware that resources exist. Though we have an increased presence and a critical role, survivors still lack a certain degree of protection when confiding in advocates professionally trained to evaluate cases and connect survivors to appropriate services. Sub. Senate Bill 41 can change that. If passed, survivors can come to a qualified rape crisis center and tell their story without the caveat that anything they say to an advocate can be compelled by subpoena. This will allow survivors the trust-based advocacy relationship they so desperately need in their recovery.

I urge you to pass Sub. Senate Bill 41, which will not only provide survivors with the critical confidential services they need, but will also show them that the lawmakers in their state understand that sexual violence is something that no one asks for, prepares for, or should have to face alone.

Thank you for taking the time to review my written support for Sub. Senate Bill 41. I am happy to provide any additional information or answer any questions you may have.

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