

*Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee and Honored Guests,*

*Good afternoon. My name is Brian Noethlich and I am appearing before you today on behalf of a former Ohio State University student who is among scores of plaintiffs in a lawsuit responding to the decades of abuse perpetrated by Dr. Strauss at OSU. For reasons that will become clear as you hear his testimony this morning, my client is unable to join you in person to share his story of gut-wrenching and horrific abuse at the hands of Dr. Strauss. He is deeply appreciative, however, for the opportunity to share his experience with you via this written testimony that I have been asked to read for you today.*

*Here are his remarks as prepared for this Committee:*

“Does this hurt?”

Ohio State University physician Richard Strauss asked me this question as he repeatedly pulled on my penis as part of a medical examination that occurred over 30 years ago. He asked the question while molesting me, after he had drugged me.

Other than that, no one at Ohio State University ever asked me about the effect Dr. Strauss’s behavior had on me. So today, I’m grateful to this Committee for finally asking those of us who were abused by Dr. Strauss what became of us.

I am a long-time resident of Ohio. Over 30 years ago, I attended The Ohio State University and was a member of two varsity athletic teams. In many ways, my dedication to both sports began with my mother. She always enjoyed attending my sports meets and competitions when I was in high school. When I learned, at age 16, that she was dying of cancer, I dedicated the hard work that went into those sports to her. I was determined to make her proud.

Initially, Ohio State offered the best of both worlds for a young man with dreams of being a star athlete: I was given a partial scholarship to OSU to join the wrestling team and another varsity sport. I enjoyed great success in both sports during my freshman year. Then my mother passed away. I was 18, crushed, and struggling to deal with losing my mom.

I decided to work even harder, probably to distract myself from my grief. But I began what I now know was an overly aggressive weight training regimen. I wasn’t drinking enough fluids, and I developed what I thought was a kidney infection. I was in a lot of pain and went to the training room at Larkins Hall to get treatment. After seeing how sick I looked, the trainers asked Dr. Strauss to help me.

Dr. Strauss made me sit and wait to see him. It seemed like forever. He made me wait until everyone else in the training room was gone. He then approached me and gave me what he said was pain medication, as he walked me from the training room to the locker room. By the time Dr. Strauss began to examine me, I was groggy and felt like I was going to pass out. What happened next, though, was so disturbing that it is impossible to forget.

Dr. Strauss instructed me to pull my pants down. Then he pulled up a chair and sat with his face directly in my groin. He began to poke around my lower stomach and genitals, and seemed especially focused on my genitals. Then he began to pull on my penis repeatedly. That’s when he asked, “Does this hurt?” I kept asking – louder and more persistent each time – “What are you doing?” Finally he stopped. And then I passed out.

I'm not sure how long I was out, but I eventually woke up face down on the ground because of unbearable rectal pain. As I came to, I realized the pain was because Dr. Strauss was lying behind me, anally raping me. Then in a creepy, high-pitched voice, Dr. Strauss asked, "Are you okay?"

I was still foggy, but I remember like it was yesterday that there was blood. Lots of blood. I reached behind me, and when I pulled my hands back, I saw only blood. I then looked at Dr. Strauss and saw his bloody penis. I am haunted, to this day, by the image of all the blood. I was shocked and scared, in tremendous pain, and didn't know what to do.

The next day I told my head wrestling coach what happened. He accused me of lying and we had a very loud argument about it. He demeaned me, argued with me, and only because of my insistence finally said that he would "take care of it." What happened, instead, was that he blacklisted me.

The following year, the same head wrestling coach no longer allowed me to wrestle. Another coach, realizing that something terrible was going on, required me to get a mental health evaluation. I started drinking – a lot – and my life was out of control. I also developed an eating disorder. And then OCD. And then anxiety. The repercussions of Dr. Strauss's rape kept snowballing and getting worse and worse. Yet no one at OSU actually bothered to "take care of it." Instead, as we now know, they allowed Dr. Strauss to continue abusing students. Despite numerous students coming forward and reporting their own experiences to OSU employees, nothing was done. I hope today's hearing will, finally, be a first step towards "taking care of it." Your support of HB 249 will, I believe, help former, current and future students hold OSU accountable. That accountability is long overdue and desperately needed so all of us can begin to heal.

In any sport, you understand that pain is inevitable and comes with the territory. But the pain that OSU expected its athletes to endure was beyond anything I ever experienced as an athlete. It is a pain beyond the physical, a pain that never stops and haunts me every day.

It has taken me a very long time, and an extraordinary amount of processing, to be able to say to you today that, while a student at The Ohio State University, I was drugged and violently raped by Dr. Richard Strauss. This was a secret I thought I'd take to my grave. But I'm able to tell you about this today, in part, because of speaking with a brave woman who was herself a victim – and is now a survivor – of a rape. She empowered me to share my story with her. After doing that, I knew it was important that I share my story with you, too.

"Does this hurt?"

More than you can imagine. But if the pain I live with, and the journey it took to allow me to share my story with you, brings about the change you are considering here today, some small healing can finally begin. For me. For my fellow OSU alumni who also suffered at the hands of Dr. Strauss. And for those who are still struggling, many in silence and in the shadows, to grasp how the school they loved could betray them so deeply and completely. From my own experience in over 30 years ago to the much more recent experiences of students – 57 of them, to be exact – whose reports to OSU's "Sexual Civility and Empowerment Unit" were never forwarded to the proper authorities, there has emerged a troubling and deeply ingrained refusal by OSU to address these issues. By refusing to do so, OSU is placing a roadblock in the healing process for survivors and a dark blemish on the University's name and legacy. I hope that, today, we will begin to end all of that.

Please support HB 249. It's time for healing to begin.