

Proponent Testimony Submitted to the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

S.B. 162

Wendy Leatherberry, Cleveland Rape Crisis Center

February 19, 2020

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today to support Senate Bill 162.

My name is Wendy Leatherberry, and I am here on behalf of Cleveland Rape Crisis Center.

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center's mission is to support survivors of rape and sexual abuse, promote healing and prevention, and advocate for social change. We provided services to 10,000 rape and sexual abuse survivors in Cuyahoga, Lake, Geauga, and Ashtabula counties in 2019 and reached an additional 40,000 people with education and prevention programs. We have a 46-year history of providing comprehensive healing services to survivors of sexual violence in collaboration with dozens of criminal justice entities at all levels of government.

Research from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention demonstrates that 1 in 5 women who live in Ohio will be raped in her lifetime, as well as 1 in 71 men. Children are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence, as are people of color, those who live in poverty and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and especially transgender. More than 1/3 of those who walk through the doors of Cleveland Rape Crisis Center for healing and advocacy services are under the age of 18.

Despite the astonishing prevalence of rape and sexual abuse, many victims often feel humiliated, ashamed and alone. We know that rape is the most under-reported crime in the United States. Approximately 2/3 of survivors do not report the rape committed against them to formal authorities, such as law enforcement.

There are many reasons why a victim of rape or sexual abuse might not come forward, chief among them fear: fear of not being believed, fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, or fear of who and how many people will find out how quickly. For many survivors it is not safe for them to come forward with their stories for months, years, and even decades after their assault took place.

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center answered 7,000 calls, text and online chats on our confidential and anonymous rape crisis and support hotline last year alone. The overwhelming majority of these calls are from survivors who have waited months, years or even decades after their assault to tell someone what happened. Sometimes that call is the first time a survivor is telling anyone what happened to them.

One of the more frequently asked questions on that hotline is whether or how a survivor should report their experience to law enforcement. Our advocates are frequently talking to survivors about their options and what they might expect if they choose to make a police report, even if the assault happened a long time ago.

Why would a survivor choose to report years or decades later? In some cases, survivors' interest in seeking justice is prompted by a sense of personal responsibility to make sure the perpetrator does not harm anyone else. In other cases, survivors feel that they have finally broken free from the paralyzing fear they have carried since the assault.

For survivors of rape and sexual abuse, healing is a life-long endeavor. There is no magic date when the pain or impact of the crime against them expires. There is no statute of limitations on their suffering. Cleveland Rape Crisis Center believes there should be no statute of limitations on their ability to seek justice or hold their offender accountable.

We strongly support S.B. 162, which would eliminate the statute of limitations on criminal and civil cases, require biological evidence to be stored as long as the case remains unsolved and eliminate exceptions to certain sex offenses that currently apply if the victim is the spouse of the offender.

When survivors of rape and sexual abuse have access to justice, more offenders are held accountable for their actions and our communities become safer

I appreciate you taking time to hear testimony on this important bill and am happy to answer any questions you may have.