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Testimony of Micaela Deming, Policy Director and Staff Attorney of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN), in support of HB 254 to the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee

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Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chair Cultrona, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee, my name is Micaela Deming and I am the Policy Director and Staff Attorney of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. I am here today representing 75 local domestic violence organizations across the state. In 2020, ODVN programs sheltered more than 7,190 DV survivors and their children and provided 111,487 survivors and children with services. Those victims needed help obtaining a protective order or support while they prosecuted their abusers. Many of them were looking for housing and other assistance as they rebuild their lives after experiencing abuse.

We appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of HB 254 today. While we have not seen the new amendments, we sincerely appreciate Rep. Abrams and Rep. Boggs for working with us to improve the bill. These comments are in anticipation of the amendments we have been discussing.

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network has been gathering data and reporting on domestic violence related fatalities in Ohio for the past 6 years. Our fatalities are collected each year from July 1st through June 30th. Because they are collected through media reports and our local programs, we do not believe that we have a complete count.

This past reporting year, there were 131 domestic violence fatalities in 90 cases.¹ That is a 20% increase over last year and a 62% increase over two years ago. There were 15 young people killed - the highest we have ever reported. Children have also been present at the scene of a fatal incident about 20-25% of the time each reporting year.² At least 86% of the deceased were killed with guns (excluding law enforcement involved deaths). While no law enforcement officers lost their lives responding to domestic violence incidents in the past year, they were involved in the death of 6 perpetrators. Since ODVN began reporting, 10 law enforcement officers were killed responding to a domestic violence incident.³

I would like to draw attention to two themes that emerged from the data this year. First, the high rate of youth fatalities.

Two of the young lives lost were killed by an older dating partner. Teenagers are at risk in dating relationships and we must do better recognizing the danger that can exist in those relationships. In two separate cases, a man with a history of domestic violence killed two young children. In one case the man shot his girlfriend's three young children; one of them survived. In the other case, during a domestic

¹ Ohio Domestic Violence Network, *Ohio Domestic Violence Fatalities July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021*. https://www.odvn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ODVN_FatalityReport_2020-2021.pdf (accessed Oct. 11, 2021).

² See *Ohio Domestic Violence Fatalities Reports*. <https://www.odvn.org/media/>

³ See *Ohio Domestic Violence Fatalities Reports*. <https://www.odvn.org/media/>

violence incident, the mother ran down to get help and while she was gone, the man shot and killed their two children.

This past year there were 3 separate cases where a husband and father annihilated his entire family using a firearm - shooting and killing his wife and all of his children in the family home. The loss for these families and these communities is unfathomable.

The second theme that emerged were cases where law enforcement or the court were notified of the danger prior to the fatal incident. At least 6 incidents involved domestic violence perpetrators who had pending domestic violence related charges. At least two of those offenders had specific pre-trial release conditions preventing them from having any contact with their victims. In two cases, the domestic violence victim called law enforcement letting them know that additional acts of violence had occurred and they were in fear that the offender would return. In one Cleveland case, while the domestic violence perpetrator was out on supervised release with a no contact order, he assaulted his victim again. Law enforcement was notified. Hours later he returned to her home again and broke in; he was killed in the confrontation. In a Columbus case, a man with pending assault charges and an order requiring him to stay away from his victim, came to her house and assaulted her. Law enforcement noted her injuries, but referred her to the prosecutor's office. The woman never made it to the prosecutor's office, though, because she and a friend were stabbed to death hours later.

Again, this is all information gathered through media reports and our local programs. What don't we know? We have no reliable race or ethnicity data. We do not know if any of these perpetrators or victims were experiencing mental health struggles, medical conditions, addiction, job loss, evictions, or were seeking treatment or services. We do not know how many of the victims had prior protection orders, child welfare, or family court involvement. We do not know if the children in the homes were reporting any difficulties or showing any signs of hardship in school. We do not know why the criminal justice system responded as it did in the cases where we knew of their involvement. We do not have a full picture of any of these situations. We ultimately believe that we are not even capturing all of the domestic violence related fatalities each year.

Without that information, we as a state and each local community are unable to fully explore system responses. We are unable to explore where our shortcomings are, and how we can improve the way we support domestic violence adult and child victims. We are also unable to explore systemic responses to abusers. The missing information is critical to enact better community and state responses to prevent domestic violence related fatalities.

HB 254 will do just that. HB 254 will permit the collection of more complete data at the local or regional and state level. While the bill does not require local communities to collect information about DV homicides, it will improve the way we collect the information. HB 254 will enact privacy protections for the information of the families who have experienced loss. It will create confidential spaces and committees to review fatalities and the system responses to those fatalities and develop recommendations for improvement at the local and state level.

On behalf of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network and its 75 member programs, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak about the increasing rate of domestic violence fatalities in Ohio

and how HB 254 can be used to begin to turn the tide. HB 254 will improve our understanding of the domestic violence fatalities that are occurring and how our systems and communities can improve to prevent future loss of life.