



Proponent Testimony
House Bill 55
House Government Oversight Committee
Camille Crary, Director of Legal Services & Policy
Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence
March 24, 2021

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 55. As Ohio's statewide coalition, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) advocates for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services for survivors and empowers communities to prevent sexual violence.

OAESV fully supports virtual testimony. Amid covid, our member rape crisis centers, staff members and volunteers, and survivor stakeholders have made considerable adjustments to their daily routines. As we survey those we serve, we know that lack of childcare and increased participation in virtual education for children has reduced capacity for travel. Reductions in overall employment options make it less likely any citizen will be willing to risk asking for time off. Medical safety concerns eliminate the prospect of in-person testimony for many.

Ultimately, we urge you to allow virtual testimony for the remainder of the pandemic – but we also ask that you consider its value for future implementation as a long overdue way to truly engage the voices of all you represent.

OAESV is a federally-designated service provider for Ohio's 34 rape crisis centers – programs that span services across 77 counties. Staff, board members, and volunteers from these agencies possess unparalleled expertise on the impact of proposed legislation on the local counties and municipalities they serve. Further, 1 in 4 woman and 1 in 6 men are sexual violence victims before the age of 18. This means that in any one of Ohio's 88 counties, approximately 1/5 of the residents have been impacted by sexual violence directly and may want to share their insight on proposed legislation.

As Director of Legal Services and Policy at OAESV, I support our members in providing testimony on various issues. Long before COVID, coordinating testimony was a challenging endeavor. Ohio's rape crisis centers provide crisis services on limited budgets, meaning many do not have staff available

for short notice travel¹ to Columbus – which can take between one and three hours of travel time one-way for many of our programs. Removing response staff for an entire day is impossible, even if that staff member could be available for virtual testimony during the specific time period set for the hearing. Most of our members have to provide written testimony or forgo the opportunity to share their critical knowledge and expertise with lawmakers.

From my own experience, I can honestly say that I took the accessibility of testimony for granted. Throughout my career, I have worked adjacent to legislative processes, meaning I was rarely in a position in which I would have had to request time off from work to provide testimony. Many of the stakeholders in our field do not have the same luxury.

Quite simply – Ohio is a very large state. By restricting in-person testimony to those who can afford to travel, have flexible jobs allowing them to be gone a full day, and have supportive family or childcare, we are losing the very voices needed to create a healthy, safe, and prosperous state. OAESV hopes that you see virtual testimony as an exciting opportunity to share the governing process with the people.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time and am available via email at ccrary@oaesv.org.

¹ Often, reimbursement for travel is unavailable as those funds are properly reserved for travel to court and hospital accompaniment.