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Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
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Written Interested Party Testimony for Senate Bill 17

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and reform Committee, my name is Micaela Deming and I am the Policy Director and Staff Attorney of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) represents 75 local domestic violence organizations across the state. Last year our programs served nearly 82,500 survivors and their children. Those victims needed shelter (9,045) or help obtaining a protective order or support while they prosecuted their abusers. Many of them were looking for housing and other assistance as they worked to rebuild their lives after experiencing abuse. ODVN appreciates the opportunity to provide interested party testimony as the committee considers Senate Bill 17.

One in four of Ohio's children have been exposed to domestic violence. It is difficult and dangerous for a protective parent to leave an abusive partner for their safety and the safety of their children. Oftentimes, leaving the abusive relationship means leaving relative economic security, stable housing, and even a job. It is also the most dangerous time for the domestic violence survivor.

Requirements to cooperate with the establishment or modification of child support following a separation due to domestic violence can add to the danger. In addition to the abuser losing regular access to their victims, in their minds, the victim is now using the state to come after their money. This leads to additional pressures on the victim to reunite with the abuser, the filing of parenting time and custody actions to take the children from the protective parent, and even the revelation of a victim's confidential location. Child Support offices are not equipped to address domestic violence at the time of filing or throughout the process. Requiring a domestic violence victim to help the state pursue child support from an abuser leaves that victim with an impossible choice – stay safe but without sufficient food or qualify for SNAP benefits but lose physical safety from the abuser.

Similarly, work requirements under Medicaid put domestic violence survivors in a terrible double bind. It takes time and resources to rebuild your life when leaving an abuser: Time to

get physically safe, address the physical and mental health needs of the adult and child survivors, and begin to re-establish stable housing and economic security. Additionally, many survivors have additional demands on their time, such as obtaining a protection order, working with child welfare, or being a victim witness in a criminal case. If the adult and child survivors do not have access to medical care during this rebuilding time because of work requirements, they will again be forced to choose between medical coverage and cooperating with prosecution, finding stable housing, or addressing the needs of the children.

In the past five years, 23 children were killed by domestic violence abusers, and seven law enforcement officers died responding to domestic violence incidents. Domestic violence fatalities in Ohio were up by 35% from July 2019 through June 2020, and preliminary [data](#) shows that domestic violence homicides are on the rise in some U.S. cities. Now is not the time to add barriers to domestic violence victims attempting to flee abusive and too often deadly relationships.

It is ODVN's position that this bill decreases safety for domestic violence survivors because it makes it more difficult for them to leave abusive relationships. It also forces them to make impossible decisions between feeding their families and taking care of their physical and mental health needs and getting to safety. Ohio must support safe families. As currently written, SB 17 does not do that.