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## **Testimony of Mary O’Doherty, Executive Director of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN), in support of SB 90 to Senate Judiciary Committee**

June 21, 2021

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Mary O’Doherty and I am the Executive Director 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 SB 90 today.

SB 90 recognizes the lethality of strangulation by separately defining the offense of strangulation in the criminal code. This is critically important because many victims experience strangulation multiple times within a relationship. In groundbreaking research conducted by ODVN and OSU here in Ohio, “[c]lose to 83% of survivors interviewed were strangled, and of those 88% of survivors said it happened a few times or too many times to count.”<sup>12</sup> And research shows that individuals who have experienced non-fatal strangulation are 700% more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than other victims. Perpetrators of domestic violence who strangle their victims are also particularly dangerous for police officers.

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.

Many of Ohio’s domestic violence programs are responding to a spike in the number of families seeking help. The number of calls to hotlines nearly tripled at some programs in the last year, and the average crisis call took more than twice as long to handle, according to a survey conducted in January 2021.<sup>3</sup> Programs

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<sup>1</sup> [Working with Brain Injuries and Mental Health in Domestic Violence Programs: Findings from the Field](#). Citing data from: JM Nemeth, PhD., unpublished data: CARE Process & Outcome Evaluation 2019 or Ohio Domestic Violence Network, unpublished data: CARE Training Evaluations, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> ODVN’s Center on Partner-Inflicted Brain Trauma continues to research and develop support for survivors of intimate partner strangulation and any resultant brain trauma that can affect their lives for years following the incident. For more information, visit: <https://www.odvn.org/brain-injury/>.

<sup>3</sup> The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) surveyed its 75 member programs from January 8 to 25, 2021, about the effects of the pandemic on domestic violence prevalence. The survey also measured the effects of budget cuts in 2019 and 2020. A total of 63 programs responded, an 84% response rate.

reported an increase in the severity and lethality of the abuse described by survivors seeking help, including an alarming increase in strangulation reports.

My colleague has worked on a number of cases involving adults and youth who have suffered strangulation at the hands of a spouse, dating partner, or during a sexual assault. Those victims suffered immediate and long-term medical conditions as a result of the strangulation but most of those offenders were never prosecuted for their crimes, the few that were received misdemeanor convictions. The lack of recognition of the severity of strangulation directly contributes to the misunderstanding of just how damaging and lethal this form of intimate partner violence can be.

We understand that SB 90 creates a new felony level offense of violence. ODVN works with all domestic violence survivors and works to advance the principles that all people have the right to an oppression and violence-free life. Through our work and our mission, we do not undertake the support of additional criminal offenses lightly. Strangulation is a uniquely violent and lethal type of domestic violence that leads to brain injury, myriad long-term medical issues, and even death – even hours or days later. It must be recognized under the law as such.

On behalf of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network and its 75 member programs, I would like to thank Sen. Kunze and Sen. Antonio for their dedication to domestic violence survivors and the recognition of the severity and lethality of strangulation. SB 90 will move Ohio forward in its response to domestic violence and save lives.