

Written Proponent Testimony

HB 196

Regards Managing Information Related to Sex Crimes

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Chief Executive Officer, Haven of Hope

Chairman Eklund, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Michelle Carpenter and I am the Chief Executive Officer at the Haven of Hope. The Haven of Hope is a nonprofit victim advocacy center in Cambridge, OH. We provide direct trauma informed services to all victims of crime in Guernsey and Noble Counties. I have been employed with the agency since 1996 and continue to provide direct services to victims of crime and their families.

Today I am here in support of House Bill 196 that would give privilege to Qualified Advocates. I have had the honor of providing trauma informed services to approximately 24,000 crime victims in my 23 years as a Victim Advocate. I have had the privilege of meeting extraordinary people who have had the most unimaginable things happen to them. It is very difficult for victims of crime to report what has happened to them. In my experience, the most difficult stories to tell are stories of domestic violence, stalking, human trafficking and sexual assault. No one wants to be a victim. No one wants to report private personal information to a stranger or a group of strangers. Sometimes reporting what has happened is so difficult they only report part of the information out of fear for their lives.

Victims of these heinous crimes really only want one thing to happen. They want it to stop. They have trust issues and safety concerns because of the terror that has been bestowed upon them. They need a safe spot to recuperate so they can make life-changing decisions to better their lives. They need to know that what they say is believed, validated and confidential so they can have a moment to weigh their options and decide what the best course of action is. They need to know that as an Advocate I am trained, I believe them, and I do not have to tell their story if they do not want me to because it is not my story to tell.

In smaller communities like the one that I live in, people know everyone. One of the major concerns for victims is that their abuser will know they were in my office or that they will find out that they have given details about their lives. At the Haven of Hope we work under confidentiality so that victims may feel more at ease. However, we have to tell them that we will not repeat their situations with anyone without their written permission or a court orders it. This does not provide a sacred place for victims to release all of the terror they have lived with. It

does not give them peace of mind. It is always in the back of their minds that if I tell everything it may come out in court. If I tell everything, their abuser will know it came from them.

If Victim Advocates had privilege we could ease those concerns for victims when they seek help. We can tell them they can be comfortable in giving all of their pain and trauma to us and they can let us carry some of that for them. Victims of crime are the bravest people I have ever met and they deserve a safe haven, they deserve a place to rest their head and they deserve the privilege of telling their stories without holding back. When a victim can tell their story in detail to an advocate and receive all of their options they can make better decisions that will increase their safety and they can start to reclaim their lives.

Violence is about power and control over the victim. When we can give the victim control immediately over their situation it elevates their ability to recover. The only control a victim has is the when, to whom and how they tell their story. Give them the ability to tell it without holding back. Give them the privilege to do so.

I am available for questions now or my email at michelle@havenofhope.org.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Chief Executive Officer