I would like to thank Senators Antonio and O’Brien for introducing SB 162 and for asking me to come and speak to you all today.

My name is Anna Cunningham and I am from Washington County, Ohio. I am a 41 -year- old divorced mother with 3 beautiful children ages 23, 22, and 12 years old. I was born in raised in the State of West Virginia by my single father, with my four siblings. I am a domestic violence survivor, a child sexual abuse survivor, a mother of 2 child sexual abuse survivors, a National registered victim’s advocate, a full-time college student, and I work at a hospital called WVU medicine Camden Clark Medical Center in Wood County, West Virginia as a housekeeper. I am a member of the Ohio Safe at Home program.

In 1991, one evening I was woken up in the middle of the night by a strange man’s voice in my bedroom, this was my uncle’s girlfriend’s son. I was sexually abused by him. I was 12 years old and scared to death. The days and weeks to come were a struggle for me. How was I going to tell anyone what happened to me? What would this do to our family? I could not bare the thought of my father being upset at his brother, it wasn’t his brother’s fault, at least this is what I thought to myself. Instead of telling my father, I told my cousin. Next thing I knew, I was being questioned by my sister, she said our cousin had told our brother, and our brother had told her, then she said, “I have to tell Dad”. A few days later, immediately after I had got off the school bus, I noticed my father and my uncle’s girlfriend, and my aunt standing in our driveway. My stomach dropped, only one thing was going through my mind. As I approached upon them, all I could do was look at my father, he looked at me and said, “I need to speak with you in my room”, and I followed him into his bedroom. Next thing I know, I am in an office building in the middle of the small town we lived in speaking with some lady about what happened to me, by my uncle’s girlfriend’s son. He was an adult and had just recently came home from Desert Storm. All I remember the lady saying to me was “This was not your fault, it is going to be okay, soon there will be a court hearing, write down everything you can remember, study it, and study your writings, in court you want to say what happened to you, nothing more and nothing less”. The day court arrived, I took the stand and testified to nothing, but the truth and the jury found him “Guilty” of sexually abusing me. Then I remember my father upset and slammed the court room doors as if he had just torn the doors off the hinges. I will never forget how hard my father slammed those court room doors. Later, I had found out why my father slammed those court room doors, it was because the court had given my abuser good credit from his time served in Desert Storm with the U.S. military and only sentenced him to not even 90 days in jail.

Today, the man that hurt me in the middle of the night in my bedroom, when I was only 12 years old, named William Morris Jr., sits on the registered sex offender list in the State of Kentucky, where he currently resides, after sexually abusing a child under the age of 15 in the State of Michigan.

Fast forward not even 4 years later, I did something wrong at home to receive discipline, and was grounded from the telephone. One day while my father wasn’t home, my sister seen me speaking on the phone and told our father on me. When my father found out he was furious, cause I was grounded, and the next time it was time to load all of us kids up in my father’s van to take us to church, he looked at me, very upset like, and said “You are not going”. I believe he wasn’t allowing me to go because I had a boyfriend at church, and I did not follow his direction when I used the telephone although I was grounded. This made me so upset. Before it was time for my father and siblings to arrive home from church. I packed up some of my clothes, school supplies, and called my neighbor girlfriend she was a few years older than me and I took off for her place. Before walking out the door, my father’s only sister, who had lived with us tried to stop me, but it didn’t work. My father never came after me, as I was only 17 years old. The pain to this day has never left me, not from my father, but from the child sexual abuse I endured, that cold dark night.

While living with my girlfriend, I was hooking up with men right and left, to this day most of them I cannot remember their names. Only a month and a half of not being in my mind, I found out I was pregnant. Absolutely know way, shape or form, was I going to pick up that telephone and tell my father.

A month or so later, as I was now living with an old church friend, she was a divorced mother with 4 children, I took a walk to the local service station, and accepted a vehicle ride from a complete stranger, he looked older than me, but handsome, so I did not care. Again, just like a month or so earlier, before I found out I was pregnant, I was still not thinking the way I should. I knew better, I grew up in church, we attended 3 services a week, our father drove one of the buses, my siblings and I attended church camp, I was taught we are supposed to save our “virginity” until marriage and yet I am making the worst decisions of my life. Within days, I found out by this man, whom I was now living with, that he was 35 years old.

The days and weeks ahead were long and dark. Almost instantly the abuse started. First it was verbal, then it was physical. Slaps to the face, punches to my entire body, kicked to the floor, beat with a belt (one hung in the kitchen as a reminder for me that if I opened my mouth it would be used on me), knots from being punched were always about my head, I was raped, and taught to barely breath in his presence or I would face a beating.

Within a little over a year after giving birth to my 1st child, I had my second child. I don’t know how I did it, but I managed to faithfully get my children and I into the church that I grew up in. We went 3 services a week, revival, I sung in the church choir, I was a Sunday school teacher, as my children got older, they attended church camp, and I was living through a life filled with abuse. I faithfully worked the same job, for 10 years until they closed their doors and I was forced to look for new work. Then my next job, my aunt helped me get into the local school board where I was employed for another 10 years. My children and I would come home from church to punched holes in the walls, our phone torn out of the wall, and one time all my family photos were hanging on the wall in their frames with the eyes cut out to every single person in the photos, except our abusers picture.

From 1995-2012, I packed up my children and we left the abuse more than a dozen times, I was granted a total of 9 separate domestic violence protection orders, the abuser took pea deals on 2 separate occasions of battery charges, after physically beating me up, was found guilty of destruction to property to my apt. door at a place only my children and I resided at while I had a active protection order, chased me down on the road, purposely crashed into my vehicle, and ran me off the roadway, among many other things.

In my divorce in 2012, I was granted a LIFETIME DV PROTECTION ORDER, and yet in 2013 my families abuser took a plea deal of 1st offense violation, after multiple violations to the said order.

In April 2016, my daughter was suicidal and checked into a behavioral health unit for a week, celebrated her 20th birthday while inside the center. After being released, filed charges with the state police against her step-father for child sexual abuse, after many horrific years of abuse that nobody knew had been happening to her.

From 2011-2016, my children and I were residents at domestic violence shelters from Parkersburg, WV to Marietta, Ohio, to Stone Mountain, GA, hiding in fear for our lives from our abuser.

In January 2020, my 22 year- old son filed charges of child sexual abuse against his biological father, for acts that nobody knew happened to him.

Since 2013, my children and myself have received services for suffering from PTSD, and Anxiety disorders.

I have a 12 year-old daughter whom is on the Principle’s List at school with straight A’s and after numerous counseling appts., she is happy, healthy, and as far as we know, did not suffer any direct abuse from the person that tortured the rest of the family, which is also her biological father.

I can not explain to you all what it feels like to be sexually abused by someone, nor would I want to. I would not wish the pain on my worst enemy.

I can not explain to you all what it feels like to be the mother of a child that has experienced child sexual abuse, nor would I want to. I would not wish this pain on my worst enemy.

I share with you a small piece of my life as a child and adult, to show you that many of us experience horrific acts before or after being raped, that plays a huge part, as to when we do or don’t open up and tell someone that we have been “raped”.

I have a girlfriend that lives in the State of SC, she is in her late 50’s, divorced, and has two grown sons, one is a high school teacher, the other is in the U.S. military. She takes care of her elderly mother, which lives with her. My friend was sexually abused by her biological father for 19 years throughout her childhood, and she took care of him through his dying days. She has never told her mother what her father did to her all throughout her childhood, as she does not want to break her mother’s heart. In the past 10 years, she told her boys what their grandfather did to her when she was a child. She struggles every day; the pain is real.

I have a friend that lives in the State of TX, she is in her late 50’s, divorced, has one child in Heaven, whom passed from natural causes as an infant, and a daughter, whom is doing well, and has children of her own. My friend was sexually abused as a child under age 11, by the old man next door to her childhood home. She told her Mom what had happened to her, and immediately her mother went next door and pounded and pounded on their door, with no answer, then she went to the next door neighbors home 2 houses down, then the next home, and the next home, until my friend’s mother found out from one of the neighbors that this old man had hurt someone else’s child in the neighborhood and one of the neighbors witnessed the old man and his wife packing up all their belongings and taking off. She struggles every day; the pain is real.

I have a friend that lives in the State of West Virginia, she is in her late 60’s, divorced, has a college degree, used to be as school teacher, she was sexually abused for 19 years of her childhood by her biological father. One time she remembers screaming as loud as she could scream through the pain of the abuse, and when she woke up the next morning her mother slapped her across the face and said next time be a little more quiet, she was 10 years old. She has never told anyone what happened to her throughout her childhood, until recently telling me and a few ladies at her church. She struggles every day; the pain is real.

I have a friend that lives in the State of West Virginia, she is in her late 60’s, married, a mother of four daughters, a grandmother of 9, has a bachelor’s degree in Psychology, she served in the Women’s Army Corps and U.S. Army Security Agency National Security, taught Rape Awareness to Army Military Police trainees & basic trainees, Instructor in Disaster psychology, she was a volunteer for the American Red Cross during Hurricane Katrina as a family service worker, from 2008-2009 she was the Coordinator for the Red Cross in Wheeling, WV , she is a member of the Tyler County, WV SEARCH & RESCUE and the Tyler County, WV Emergency Response Team.

She is a survivor of child sexual abuse, domestic violence in her 1st marriage, military sexual assault, and in 1986 was robbed at gun point; kidnapped, tortured, and raped while working at a service station, she testified before the Alabama Attorney Generals Victims Task Force.

She grew up in Paden City, WV with her father and mother, and four siblings.

The day before Thanksgiving of 1965, my friend’s daddy was diagnosed with colon cancer, her daddy was only 42 and her mother was only 32. She was only 11 years old. Imagine holding your Daddy in your arms as he is sitting on the toilet bleeding out, your Mommy is calling the Ambulance, which in those days, the town hearse, was the Ambulance, and the driver was your Daddy’s best friend, he took your Daddy to the local hospital, he survived emergency surgery, and came home a few days before Christmas.

In March of 1966, a few days before my friend’s 12th birthday, her Daddy went back to the hospital, and on April 4, 1966 her Daddy passed away. Her daddy was only 42 years old and her mommy was only 32.

The day of his funeral it was a cold and rainy day, as taps were being played, an American Flag was handed to her Mommy and her Daddy was laid to rest. He was a World War II veteran with the U.S. navy and a U.S. army veteran of the Panama Conflict.

Within a year, my friend’s mother, bought a trailer in Marietta, Ohio, moved her and her four siblings away from the small town in Paden City, WV where the school had a graduating class of maybe 60, to now attending a school with a graduating class of maybe 420 kids. Her mother remarried, worked outside of the home, as did her stepfather. As the oldest child, you were now forced to step up to the plate and help your mother care for your siblings and the daily tasks at home, and she was only 13 years old.

Almost immediately, as you slept only 20 ft. away from your mother and stepfather, one night he begins to sexually abuse you, this happens over and over again, for years.

At the age of 18, you join the U.S. Military to escape the abuse, and when she and her sister were in their late 30’s, you learn that your stepfather started sexually abusing your sister immediately after you left home, and she was only 9 years old. After she disclosed this to you, she also discloses that your middle brother found out back then what was happening to her, and he took advantage of the situation and started sexually abusing your sister also. Your sister files charges with the Washington County, Ohio police dept. and due to the Statue of Limitations in the beginning of the 90’s, there was nothing the law could do for your sister or you.

Today, my friend’s sister lives with their mother and cares for her, as she is in her late 80’s, in the late stages of dementia and you help care for her as well. Her stepfather is deceased and has been for many years now and your brother lives out of state and denies everything. Her mother knew that her daughters were experiencing horrific abuse at the hands of her husband as they were small children, yet today these girls are caring for their mother.

My friend’s name is Penny Howard, she is a retired military veteran, her husband is as well, he is also a retired police officer after 35 years of service. She is a mother to four daughters, a grandmother to 9 children, a sister, a daughter, a friend, a neighbor, an outstanding citizen, and someone who is and has been directly affected by the statue of limitations on rape in this state.

In March of 2018, I coordinated a Child Abuse and Sexually Assault Awareness event at the local park in Parkersburg, WV. As I was going around handing out flyers, I spoke with a lot of different people. I spoke with a man that worked at the local wedding supplies store and he told me “Thank you, thank you so much for what you are doing, I was sexually abused as a child and no one helped me”. I spoke with a lady at one of the local beauty shops, as I handed her a flyer, she started to cry, as she said “No, no, I cannot talk about this subject, I was hurt too” She is a beautician at this shop, probably in her late 50’s. I spoke with a lady at another beauty shop about the awareness event and she opened up and told her story to me. Her father sexually abused her all throughout her childhood, as a young adult she told her mother and to this day her mother is still married to him. She confronted her father on the horrific things he had done to her when she was growing up and he denied her memories. I spoke with a lady that works at a local dentist office, her father sexually abused her throughout her entire childhood, her mother and father are still married and she has never told anyone, she told me she has thought about telling someone, but cannot bare to imagine what anyone in the family will do or say if she opened up and told. I spoke with a man that worked in the local Dollar General store, probably in his mid-50’s, he told me that he was sexually abused by a relative as a child, and no one would believe him. The pain is real.

I once had a school bus driver named Gary, that picked my siblings and I up for school in the mid 90’s. He would play country music on the bus for all the children, if everyone was quiet and did not act up. Every holiday the bus driver would give all of us children a apple or an orange as we exited his bus on a holiday. In the mid 2000’s, I was speaking with a girlfriend at work, I do not remember exactly what we were talking about exactly, but I do remember we got on the topic of schools we had attended while growing up. I told her about what schools I had attended and about the school bus driver named “Gary” that picked my siblings and I up for school in the mid-90’s, when she stopped speaking and just stared at me with a shell shocked look on her face, and I asked her what was wrong, she went on to say that “Gary, was my biological father and he sexually abused my older sisters when the were little kids under age 10 and in their later years, after age 20, they opened up about what he had done to them, filed charges, and to this day he is rotting in jail”. She went on to say how thankful she was that her sisters were able to disclose what had happened to them in order to potentially save another child from abuse.

In August 2018, I was a student staying in one of the dorms at the OHIO Peace Officers Academy, for victim advocate training. My classmates and I were given the opportunity to either tour the prison across the street, or the BCI building. I chose to tour the BCI building. After our tours were over with, we had a break and I spoke with one of my classmates about our tours, she had toured the prison. I asked her how that tour was and if it was very informational, as the tour inside BCI was. She told me “Yes, the tour was nice. We had an opportunity to sit down with a few different prisoners, ask them questions, and listen to what they had to say to us, and one of the prisoners was a man in his late 50’s, he told us that he was sexually abused as a child, I never told, and I have allowed it to ruin my entire life, and if he had his life to live all over again, he would tell and tell anybody he could”.

I would like to share with you some of the disorders survivors of sexual abuse are known to suffer from:

**P.T.S.D.;** a disorder in which a person has difficulty recovering after experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event. Some of the symptoms people may experience; (a) agitation (b) irritability (c) hostility (d) hypervigilance (e) self-destructive behavior (f) social isolation (g) flashbacks (h) fear (i) severe anxiety (j) insomnia or nightmares

**Battered Person Syndrome:** a physical and psychological condition of a person

who has suffered (usually persistent) emotional, physical, or sexual abuse from

another person. The syndrome develops in response to a 3 -stage cycle found in

domestic violence situations. The syndrome was first researched extensively by

Lenore E. Walker, an American psychologist, who founded the Domestic Violence

Institute.

**Bipolar Disorder:** a disorder associated with episodes of mood swings ranging from depressive lows to manic highs

**Clinical Depression:** a mental disorder characterized by persistently depressed mood or loss of interest in activities

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** a disorder that causes severe, ongoing anxiety that interferes with daily activities

**Dissociative Identity Disorder, also called DID;** a disorder characterized by the presence of two or more distinct personality states

**Stock holm Syndrome:** feelings of trust or affection felt in many cases of kidnapping or hostage-taking by a victim toward a captor

Confusion, denial, fear, shame, self-blame, no support system, a need to protect the perpetrator, among other factors are just some of the reasons those that are hurt by sexual abuse open up and speak at different times in their life, whether it be immediately after the crime took place, a few months after, or many years after the abuse.

Every single person in this room are different in their own way. Some of us have quiet personalities, while others are very outspoken, and some of us are extremely shy. No one has the right to tell another person just how long they have to open up and disclose the crime of sexual abuse that has been committed against their person.

Some people might have lost their virginity at age 12, while others did not lose their virginity until age 17, 20, or even 25 years of age. Everyone speaks about their personal body and personal milestones with the person they are in a relationship in their own time. Can you imagine how you felt thinking about telling your girlfriend or boyfriend when you lost your virginity or maybe how many people you had ever had sexual relations with before?

Now, if you are mentally capable of doing so, think about yourself being sexually abused at some point in your life, think about how fast you would tell someone or how long it might take you to disclose this extreme, horrific crime against your personal body OR think about the idea that might immediately come to the forefront of your mind, I am never going to tell anyone? Everyone has a VOICE and we are all entitled to use it at any point of time in our life.

For the economy to continue to thrive across the great State of Ohio and our great country we must have a people who are in the best mental and physical health possible. Safety and Protection should be afforded to all. We are the land of the free because of the free. If we the people cannot disclose crimes committed against our person in our own time, these crimes, especially “RAPE” have us in bondage, then how can we call ourselves free people?

It is time for ALL victims of rape to no longer be “Gagged!”

On behalf of every single man, boy, woman, and girl across the entire State of Ohio, I ask you from the bottom of my heart, Please support SB 162 which would remove the Statue of Limitations on Rape and eliminate the spousal exemptions and help ensure every citizen across the State of Ohio is FREE from abuse and Free from bondage.

God Bless All Survivors.

Anna L. Cunningham

Victim/Survivor/Mother of 2 survivors/National registered victim’s advocate