**February 19, 2020**

**Senate Bill 162 - Proponent Testimony**

**Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee**

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Thank you, Chairman Eklund, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee.

My name is Dodie Sacia. Thank you for this opportunity to share my views as a citizen and Registered Advocate in the state of Ohio and a National Credentialed Advocate. I have been a volunteer with the Rape Crisis Center of Medina and Summit Counties since 2008 and have accumulated over 17,000 volunteer hours advocating for survivors of sexual violence. The Rape Crisis Center of Medina and Summit Counties provides therapy, support and advocacy for survivors and co-survivors. Our advocates answer a 24-hour hotline and respond to survivors at our offices, local hospitals, police stations and the courts. My main focus involves following criminal cases through the justice system in the municipal and county courts. Over the last 12 years I have tracked over a thousand sex offense cases in my county alone and have seen the long-lasting trauma that survivors and their loved ones have endured at the hands of remorseless perpetrators. I have watched countless courageous men, women and children testify in court against their attackers, sometimes sitting within a few feet of the person who raped them.

In addition to being active in the Summit County Sexual Assault Coalition and the Summit County Sexual Assault Response Team, I am a founding member of our state coalition, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence. Each year when the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Alliance visits the Ohio Statehouse, we remind legislators of the importance of eliminating the statute of limitations for rape and removing the spousal exception for certain sex offenses. Statistics show that the majority of survivors of sexual violence still do not report these crimes due to embarrassment, self-blame, fear of retaliation, fear of not being supported, and especially fear of not being believed. I know the numerous cases I track are just the tip of the iceberg, which should shock every one of us as it shocked me when I started volunteering. In many cases survivors will not report these heinous crimes until they feel safe to do so, which can be decades later. And sometimes even when they report immediately, the crimes are not prosecuted due to lack of evidence.

As a rape crisis advocate, I often hear survivors confide that they were raped many years ago, but never reported their assaults. They may have been distraught at the time due to the trauma they suffered. They may have been unwilling to risk further harm or loss by reporting to law enforcement. Or they may have been children who did not recognize what sexual abuse means. Whatever the reason they were unable to pursue justice at the time of the crime, they should not be denied the opportunity to see their perpetrator be held accountable if and when the day comes that they are ready to go forward.

Ohio’s massive efforts in the past several years to test over 14,000 previously untested sexual assault kits going back decades instilled hope that it was finally time for survivors of sexual violence to get the justice they deserve. Results of this extensive statewide “Sexual Assault Kit Initiative” revealed that there were many serial rapists who had escaped being caught only to rape again and again simply because the kits had not been tested. With advanced DNA testing techniques more cases may now be solved with irrefutable evidence. The Akron Police Department has recently acquired grants to investigate and prosecute these cold case sexual assaults, but the number of cases is staggering and the clock is ticking. Sadly, there are survivors whose cases are beyond the current statute of limitations and although their attackers were finally identified, there could be no prosecution. Our laws need to change to prevent this injustice from happening in the future.

As you all are acutely aware, a major predator in our own state is Dr. Richard Strauss. Hundreds of male survivors have disclosed sexual abuse he inflicted over many years while he worked at Ohio State University. There must be ways for these survivors to seek justice in civil cases.

I believe there is never enough justice for a survivor of sexual violence. Even if a case is successfully prosecuted, the result can never turn back the clock and undo the crime. In many cases it takes a lifetime of attempting to heal the trauma that survivors experience. Why should perpetrators get a free pass from punishment when they inflict this type of life-altering damage? We need to update our laws to protect Ohio citizens from the re-victimization of justice denied due to an arbitrary and archaic statute of limitations.

Thank you to Senators Nickie Antonio and Sean O’Brien for their courage to sponsor this bill. Rape survivors and those who love them applaud your dedication to this long-awaited elimination of the statute of limitations for rape in both criminal and civil cases. We all look forward to hearing that this legislation has passed.