

To: Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Brianna Beech, Victims' Rights Advocate, Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center

Date: November 15, 2022

Re: H.B. 343 Proponent Testimony

Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Brianna Beech, and I am here today to talk about my journey throughout the criminal justice system and how it has shaped my viewpoint regarding Marsy's Law.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

When I was a kid, I knew I wanted to focus my career on helping people, but I never knew the path I would take or where I would end up. If someone told me back then that I would end up sharing my story in front of you all today, I never would have believed them. I grew up in Strongsville, Ohio in a very well-off, tight knit family. Yet, during my adolescent years, I found myself stuck in a four-year on-going abusive relationship at the age of 16. This was the first relationship I had ever been in, and it was one that was very close to taking my life. Like most abusive relationships, it started off great, but then became a vicious cycle that continuously spiraled downhill. The constant jealousy, isolation, name calling, getting in fights with my friends and family, and manipulation. It didn't take long before our relationship became physical and those fights are ones that when I close my eyes, I remember so vividly. When I got the courage to call the police and reach out for help, it turned into him threatening to kill me, kill my family, and kill himself. Throughout those years, I felt lost and confused. Every time I swore that I was done, he came back crying and saying how sorry he was. He

said that he would never be okay without me; and I was more terrified that he would do something to himself, than him doing something to me.

I, like many victims in my situation, thought that things would get easier once I went to the police, but unfortunately that wasn't the case. For me, it got more confusing, more upsetting, and much more draining. I obtained a civil protection order back in 2016, which was granted for the maximum of 5 years. It seemed like a huge deal at the time, however to my ex-boyfriend, it was just a piece a paper that he continuously violated. It is very hard to imagine how much courage it takes to stand next to your abuser and speak the truth, until you go through it yourself. I remember counting down the days until the next court hearing, dreading the day so much that I was sick to my stomach, driving to court in silence with my parents, just for another continuance to be granted.

I remember walking into the courthouse and since there weren't separate waiting rooms, I had to walk right past him and in doing so, I felt an incredible sense of guilt for us both being there. While there was guilt, there was also fear about what would happen to me when he got out. Would he follow through with his words? I remember asking my advocate if it was possible to drop the charges against him, while I lied to her and told her things had been better. By the end of the hearing, I was crying in the back of the court room, because things had not gotten better. In fact, a week before the hearing was when he choked me up against my car and told me he would kill me right there. I will never forget what my advocate told me that day, she said "We don't call it choking in the court system, we call it strangulation, and if someone strangles you, the chances of them killing you are 75% higher."

That was something that always replayed in my head and still does to this day. I use that line all the time while I am talking to victims on the phone, to help those who were just like me realize the seriousness of their situation.

While it had been a long road, I was very lucky, as I had two incredible advocates that I worked with through those years, and I also had amazing law enforcement officers who gave me hope for a better tomorrow. They believed my story and they wanted to help me, but that doesn't stop me from thinking about how different things would have been if Marsy's Law were passed back then. If it had been, I would have known that I had a right to confer with the prosecutor and requested that right. I would have understood the importance of being heard at the hearings and while no victim has a veto, they have a voice that can change a lot. If HB 343 were passed back then, I would have been given a victim waiver form and known how to request my rights. I would have known the importance of being present at arraignments, and I would have asked for higher bond requirements to be put in place. On three different occasions, my abuser was arrested at night, and let out first thing in the morning before I woke up. I had no say in this and I was left petrified, wondering what would happen next. HB 343 would change that for victims and offer them the protection that they deserve.

I would have also known about victim impact statements and pushed myself to write one. I spent countless hours after hearings feeling like I never received closure, having so many things left unsaid, and never having a chance to explain what his actions did to me. I would have also asked for the highest sentence to be imposed. While the judge did sentence him to the maximum jail time, I would have asked for mental health counseling, GPS monitoring, and

batterer intervention programming. He is not in my life anymore, but I worry about the other women who cross his path today. Knowing that I could have at least requested he undergo counseling and programming would have given me some sort of peace of mind. I would have asked for a separate waiting area so that I didn't have to see him before entering the court room. I would have also asked for restitution. While no amount of money could make up for those years of hell that he put me through, the satisfaction of knowing that he had to pay me back would have made a significant difference in my healing process.

While it has been years since my experience with the criminal justice system, if HB 343 is passed, it would allow me the ability to seek redaction of my name and any identifying information from all public record.

Today, I serve as a Victims' Rights Advocate at Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center, and I work to uphold victims' rights throughout the criminal justice system. I educate victims on their rights under Marsy's Law and explain the opportunities that are out there for them because of it. This law has paved the way for victims and has given them the opportunity to have rights for the traumatic experiences they have endured. This law ensures that no victim feels alone, silenced, or small. We cannot go back and change the outcomes for the survivors in the past, however, we can do better than we did before. There are a lot of revisions that this bill makes to the Ohio Revised Code regarding crime victims' rights and while they may seem small to some, those revisions can be life changing to someone who has gone through so much. We must protect crime victims when they reach out to us for help, and we must do

better. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter and thank you, for giving me the opportunity for my voice to be heard.