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**Maria York, Policy Director**  
**Ohio Domestic Violence Network**  
**Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**November 15, 2022**  
**Proponent Testimony for HB 343**

Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and Senate Judiciary Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 343, which seeks to expand the rights of crime victims in Ohio. As Ohio's federally designated domestic violence coalition, the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) advances the principle that all people have the right to an oppression and violence-free life and advocates for changes in our economic, social, and political systems to empower communities statewide to prevent domestic violence.

ODVN supports many of the provisions in this bill as it provides clarifying language to all the parties in the criminal justice system on how to comply and uphold crime victim rights. Some provisions may even make it safer for domestic violence survivors who choose to participate in the process. Victims deserve dignity and respect. They deserve to be notified and heard at criminal proceedings. And they deserve to be informed regarding the status of their offender.

ODVN represents 76 local domestic violence organizations across the state. Many of the victims in our programs' services are interacting with the courts and police every day. In 2021, ODVN programs sheltered more than 9,118 survivors, including 3,965 children, and provided 80,706 survivors and children with services.<sup>1</sup> Those victims needed help obtaining a protective order or support while they navigated the complex legal system. Many of them were looking for housing, financial assistance, counseling, and other support as they rebuilt their lives after experiencing abuse.

In February, ODVN released a statewide survey of more than 500 domestic violence survivors to deepen our understanding of their experiences when seeking safety and services from law enforcement, courts, and social services agencies.<sup>2</sup> About two thirds of the participants were satisfied with their experiences with the criminal justice system, but gaps in services emerged as an issue for all survivors, and some data showed bias in how criminal justice systems respond to victims, particularly marginalized victims.

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<sup>1</sup> For calendar year 2021. [ODVNFactSheet June2022](#). Accessed November 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Seeking Safety, Equity, and Justice. 2021 Ohio Statewide Survey Results: Domestic Violence Survivors; Experiences with Law Enforcement, Courts, Child Welfare, and Social Service Systems. [https://www.odvn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Seeking\\_Safety\\_Equity\\_and\\_Justice\\_Appendices.pdf](https://www.odvn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Seeking_Safety_Equity_and_Justice_Appendices.pdf). Accessed November 2022.

Black/African American women, other women of color, immigrants, LGBTQ+ and Deaf or Hard of Hearing survivors were over-represented among the participants who said they had difficulty getting help from the police, courts, and social services. And victims who felt their concerns were not taken seriously by the police were much more likely to come from marginalized communities.

The survey showed that there's room for significant improvement in the way survivors experience the court system. Of the respondents who had filed criminal charges, only 59% received help from an advocate at the prosecutor's office. About 12% of respondents said they felt pressure from the court advocate or prosecutor to make a decision they did not feel comfortable with. Non-Black women of color reported feeling the most pressure out of the other groups. Among the survivors who previously had a protection order (criminal or civil), 14% said they were criticized by court personnel for seeking a protection order after the new incident. 39% said they were criticized by prosecutors.<sup>3</sup>

HB 343 is needed to ensure that the criminal justice system consistently informs crime victims of their rights at every step in the process. Doing so will allow survivors to feel heard, better understand the process, and exercise their rights.

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network and our member programs would like to thank Representative White's leadership on this issue. We would also like to thank her for continuously working to improve the language around the crime victims' rights notification form. We strongly believe that HB 343 can move victims' rights forward and improve options and access for victims in the state of Ohio.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on survivors' experiences with the court systems, please visit ODVN's brief fact sheet, [SeekingSafety FactSheet 2.pdf \(odvn.org\)](#). Accessed November 2022.