



**Ohio Victim Witness Association**

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**Sub. H. B. No. 343: Proponent Testimony**

**Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas and members Antani, Gavarone, and Schuring of the Senate Judiciary Committee:**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of House Bill 343 which seeks to expand the essential rights of crime victims in Ohio.

Prior to February 2018, when Marsy's Law took effect, Ohio was operating under a state-specific Crime Victims' Rights Act. The amendment, passed in 1994 and codified in 1996, went through many revisions throughout the years but was still lacking in content and enforcement. In November 2017, 83% of Ohio voters overwhelmingly showed their support of expanding victims' rights. Ohioans made their message clear that victims should not only have rights but that they should also have recourse when and/or if their rights are not upheld.

While this was a major milestone in the victims' rights movement, we recognize that the constitutional amendment requires subsequent legislative language to more specifically define and provide conditions for the amendment. A state-wide group, which included the Ohio Victim Witness Association ("OVWA"), was formed and began work on this legislative language. This group quickly learned that in order for this bill of rights to accomplish its goal of protecting and upholding essential rights for victims of crime, there had to be adequate guidance and parameters for compliance.

It has been over four years since Ohioans approved Marsy's Law. Our courts, prosecutors, law enforcement, and advocates require the guidance from HB 343 so that they may properly uphold victims' rights in Ohio and provide the legal support that victims so desperately need on their road to resiliency and justice. We believe this legislation will ensure that crime victims are able to understand and exercise their rights; that it will hold accountable those within the system responsible for ensuring victims' rights; and that it will send a clear message that victims' rights will be as vigorously upheld as those of the defendant.

It is imperative that this legislation be passed. Ohioans are experiencing their worst days when they or a loved one become a

victim of crime. Their dignity, security, health, and in some cases, their lives are being taken from them. House Bill 343 not only provides victims with enforceable rights but it also sets the path for recovery and resiliency. House Bill 343 allows victims to be an active part of the criminal justice process. If victims feel empowered throughout the criminal justice process, they have a higher chance of recovering from what happened to them. We believe that House Bill 343 is not only a foundational component to our criminal justice system but also a step towards more trauma-informed communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



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