

**Proponent testimony submitted to the
Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
House Bill 161
April 17, 2024**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks Hudson and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Lesa Gifford and I am a Forensic Nurse Examiner. I am testifying in favor of HB 161, to eliminate the spousal exceptions from the current ORC.

In my previous marriage, I was raped several times by my husband and was told that there was nothing that could be done under the current law. He knew this law and continued to rape me and told me that it was legal. I also have two adult daughters whom I discourage getting married to their partners, due to this current law. I would never want them to suffer in silence like I did because the law is not there to protect them. I now have grandchildren. One of them is 17 years old and is in a serious relationship. I would never want them to think that this is normal to be able to rape their spouse.

The majority of rapes are committed by someone the victim knows. I felt the need to testify to help change Ohio and make it a place where all individuals feel safe in their relationships. I advocate for victims of crime every day in my current job. And I feel I needed to advocate for victims that do not have a voice or feel that since this is the law, they have to comply.

I am asking that you vote to be in favor of passing House Bill 161 to make the future better for our children, our grandchildren and Ohio. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony. Your consideration of these matters and solutions is very much appreciated. I am willing to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,
Lesla Gifford