



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Ohio Anti-Rape Coalition Rejects Rep. Schmidt's Devastating Comments
and Strongly Warns Against Harms of HB 598**

The Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) denounces statements made by Ohio House Representative Jean Schmidt on April 27, 2022 in a hearing for HB 598, a bill that would completely eliminate access to abortion in Ohio without exceptions, should the United States Supreme Court overturn *Roe v. Wade*. This type of legislation is frequently referred to as a “trigger ban”.

As OAESV has consistently stated in the past, survivors of sexual violence deserve bodily autonomy. Survivors of sexual violence often experience long-lasting trauma and commonly endure violation of their bodies. We reject bills that make it illegal for a survivor of rape to be in control of their own decisions if they become pregnant as a result of rape or incest.

During a hearing for the anti-abortion bill, which would have no exceptions for survivors of rape or incest, Rep. Schmidt said that rape is, “A shame when it happens, but an opportunity for that woman, no matter how old or young she is, to make a determination about what she’s going to do to help that life become a productive human being.” Rep. Schmidt went on to add that a rape victim should be forced to carry the fetus, no matter the emotional, mental or physical trauma.

Let us be clear: Rape is not an “opportunity” for any victim/survivor. It is a traumatic event that often results in a range of life-long negative effects. The comments made by the Representative demonstrate the victim-blaming rape culture that continues to normalize, excuse, and minimize sexual violence, causing sexual violence to be one of the most underreported crimes.

As Ohio’s federally designated anti-sexual violence coalition, OAESV strongly rejects these statements. When policies such as HB 598 fail to account for survivors of rape and incest, they run the risk of causing immeasurable harm, thereby beginning a cycle of generational trauma and suffering. Being forced to carry a pregnancy to term can have devastating psychological, physical, and financial impacts. Recovering from sexual assault is a difficult process; HB 598 would erase opportunities for survivors right at the moment when they

need power and control over their lives in order to begin healing. Survivors must not be forced to endure pregnancies caused by the horrific criminal acts perpetrated against them.

On April 27, OAESV also hosted its 10th Annual Advocacy Day to End Sexual Violence at the Ohio Statehouse and celebrated the passage of HB 571 to designate April as Sexual Assault Prevention Awareness Month. While a number of state legislators participated in this event and expressed support for survivors of sexual violence, we are disheartened to note that some of these same legislators are now co-sponsoring HB 598. Any bill that harms survivors is no way to raise awareness or support survivors of this horrible crime. We ask legislators to support survivors across the board.

Ohioans, contact your lawmakers today – you can find them at <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/> Tell them about the importance of bodily autonomy for survivors of sexual violence and how essential the restoration of choice and agency is for survivors after rape. HB 598 clearly eliminates any and all opportunities for survivors to heal on their own terms. Survivors must have the ability to move forward with their life, without delay or alteration to their life as a result of an offender’s actions.

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Interviews available upon request.

As Ohio's statewide coalition, OAESV uses an anti-oppression lens to advocate for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services for survivors and to empower communities to prevent sexual violence.