



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Taylr Ucker-Lauderman  
Chief Officer of Communications & Engagement  
Phone: (216) 317-2339  
Email: [tucker-lauderman@oaesv.org](mailto:tucker-lauderman@oaesv.org)  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/oaesv/>  
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/OhioAllianceESV>  
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/oaesv/>

**Ohio Anti-Sexual Assault Coalition Hosts 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Advocacy Day at Statehouse;  
Over 150 Survivors, Advocates, and Lawmakers Joined**

Columbus, Ohio – On Thursday, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) hosted over 150 people at their advocacy day at the Ohio Statehouse, an opportunity for the state’s sexual violence survivor advocates to speak directly with lawmakers and advocate for survivor-centered legislation. In the morning session, several speakers, including legislators, survivors, and advocates from community-based rape crisis programs, addressed the audience regarding important legislation and current needs of survivors and rape crisis centers in the state. Ohio Governor Mike DeWine's office also presented OAESV with a proclamation naming April 2023 Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

During the program, OAESV President & Chief Executive Officer Rosa Beltré addressed the audience with a reminder of the day’s purpose: “We cannot continue to do the work the way we’ve been doing it. Survivors need more, we need more, we deserve more. It is time to shape Ohio into the state that is inclusive, loving, supportive.”

OAESV, the host of the event, is the training and technical assistance provider for advocates and preventionists around Ohio, and leads the state’s public policy advocacy for survivors of sexual violence.

The morning event also celebrated the progress and passing of legislation from the 134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, including Erin’s Law, which requires developmentally-appropriate sexual abuse prevention education in Ohio’s K-12 schools, passed after many years of advocacy. One of the bill’s sponsors, Representative Scott Lipps, reminisced about the emotional night the bill was finally passed and celebrated the audience members by adding, “Without you, without the coalition of rape crisis programs, this would not have passed. So, thank you.”

Several of the speakers noted that they are survivors of sexual violence themselves, and one survivor in particular spoke about his experience and his approach to advocating with lawmakers. Chris Graham has worked closely with sponsors of House Bill 35, the Scout’s Honor Law, alongside the other survivors advocating for the bill. He said, “I saw these men speaking truth to power. To come forward and talk about what happened to them. It

inspired me.” He encouraged the audience, “You’re allowed to just show up and knock on doors and ask for a meeting. You’re allowed to stop representatives as they’re leaving. If you try to befriend them, speak with kindness, and hear their position, magic can happen.”

In the over 80 meetings that took place with legislators, event attendees were able to provide their close experiences with these issues and educate lawmakers on the needs of survivors and advocates. Senate Minority Leader Allison Russo underscored the importance of this: “When people ask me what they can do to make a difference in the work we do at the Statehouse, I tell them that telling your personal stories is one of the most impactful ways of telling what you’re going through and the impact [of sexual violence].”

OAESV’s Director of Public Policy, Emily Gemar, explains, “Our coalition came out in force this week to advocate with their lawmakers on the need for increased funding for rape crisis services in the operating budget, which Governor DeWine included in his proposed budget at \$30 million. We expanded our advocacy efforts to also encourage support for House Bill 124 (Representative Galonski, Representative Miranda) to address expanding the civil statute of limitations for survivors of sexual abuse and House Bill 143 (Representative Grim) to create essential housing protections to enhance survivor safety in the aftermath of a crime.”

Representative Jessica Miranda, also a self-identified survivor of sexual violence, explained the importance of HB 124: “One day survivors may decide that it’s time for justice. But while they’re building their case, they are informed that too much time has passed. Their window for justice has expired. Their case is automatically null and void and no justice can be served. Ohio’s outdated laws are failing survivors.”

Teresa Stafford, Executive Director of a community-based rape crisis program Hope & Healing Survivor Resource Center, asked for increased action as folks left the Statehouse: “We need legislation without loopholes; funding that comes without barriers for survivors; accountability for all who are responding to sexual violence; rape crisis leaders who can move past theory and apply an intersectional lens to their work; and a community that believes that survivors deserve access.”

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*Interviews available by 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. **Find our [press kit](#) here.***