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House Bill 161 Passes Ohio Senate

On Wednesday, April 24, 2024, the Ohio Senate voted to unanimously pass House Bill 161 (“Eliminate spousal exceptions for certain sex offenses”) to end the spousal rape loophole in Ohio’s sex crimes. This marks the final step in the legislative process for the bill, which will now be sent to Ohio Governor DeWine for signature.

As the federally recognized anti-sexual violence coalition for Ohio, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) has advocated for the closure of this harmful loophole since their inception because a marriage license shouldn’t be a defense to rape in Ohio. OAESV commends members of the Ohio Senate for their swift action in passing House Bill 161. Spousal rape is a serious issue with far-reaching consequences. For too long, survivors of spousal rape and other forms of sexual violence have been met with a similar refrain when trying to report the abuse: “What happened to you isn’t a crime in Ohio.” That changes this year with the passage of House Bill 161.

OAESV also extends its gratitude to the bill sponsors, Former Representative Hamilton County Auditor Jessica Miranda and Representative Brett Hillyer (R-Uhrichsville), for their unwavering commitment to this bill and the survivors impacted by this loophole. They also extend their thanks to Senator Nathan Manning and Senator Stephanie Kunze for their advocacy in the Senate for the bill. OAESV worked with several survivors who testified in support of House Bill 161 during its committee hearings over the past year. Elevating survivor voices is instrumental to the policymaking process.

OAESV Public Policy Director Emily Gemar notes, “Today marks a historic day in Ohio’s history. I want to uplift that this would not have been possible if not for the survivors who testified in front of the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate. At OAESV, we are centered on expanding options for all survivors in the state – whether that be eliminating barriers to the legal system, healthcare, education, or other areas that impose hurdles for survivors. The passage of House Bill 161 brings us closer to an Ohio where survivors of crime can pursue justice on their terms and finally report the harm they have experienced and be taken seriously.”

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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.