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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Ohio's Sexual & Domestic Violence Coalitions Oppose HB 172 which Could Eliminate Counseling for Child Victims of Rape and Other Familial Crimes**

The federally recognized sexual and domestic violence coalitions are calling on state lawmakers to oppose House Bill 172, warning that the measure would strip away critical mental health protections for child survivors of sexual abuse, incest, dating violence, and other forms of abuse.

#### **Existing Law Already Protects Parental Rights While Prioritizing Child Safety**

Ohio's current statute<sup>1</sup> was crafted to balance parental involvement and child protection. This law limits confidential counseling to short-term care and requires parental notification after six sessions or 30 days. Most minors who begin counseling confidentially later involve a safe adult once trust and stability are established. This narrowly tailored provision allows children in unsafe homes to safely seek help from a licensed counselor when parental involvement is not safe or appropriate, such as when the parent is the perpetrator of abuse.

If enacted, House Bill 172 would repeal this law, effectively eliminating confidential counseling access for minors and cutting off a vital bridge to safety, disclosure, and healing.

"This bill would mean that a 14-year-old who has been raped by a parent could not access trauma counseling without that same parent's permission," said Emily Gemar, Director of Public Policy with OAESV. "We should be expanding access to trauma-informed care in our state, not eliminating it."

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<sup>1</sup> See: O.R.C. 5122.04

## **HB 172 Puts Ohio's Children at Risk**

OAESV and ODVN warn that the proposed legislation would have devastating consequences:

- Denies survivors of incest, sexual abuse, and trafficking access to lifesaving trauma counseling.
- Blocks early disclosure of abuse, preventing counselors from connecting victims to law enforcement and child protective services – which they are mandated to do under Ohio law.
- Increases risk of suicide and self-harm, as children who experience sexual violence are about 3 times more likely to attempt suicide.<sup>2</sup>
- Undermines Ohio's trauma-informed care system, which has been built over decades through partnerships between national, state, and local agencies.

Research confirms that early access to trauma counseling can significantly reduce long-term mental health impacts, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal ideation.<sup>3</sup>

"Sound public policy protects the innocent and holds offenders accountable, even if the perpetrator is a parent. HB 172 would permit abusive parents to evade accountability and continue to commit abuse," said ODVN's policy director, Maria York.

### **About the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV)**

The Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) is the federally designated sexual assault coalition for Ohio. OAESV works with survivors, rape crisis centers, and allied organizations across the state to prevent sexual violence and ensure comprehensive responses for victims. The Alliance leads statewide policy advocacy, professional training, and public awareness initiatives that center the voices and safety of survivors.

### **About the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN)**

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network is Ohio's federally designated domestic violence coalition, with a network of 76 local domestic violence organizations throughout the state. The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) believes that ending violence against all people—regardless

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<sup>2</sup> Shanta R. Dube et al., "Childhood Abuse, Household Dysfunction, and the Risk of Attempted Suicide," *JAMA* 286, no. 24 (2001): 3089–3096.

<sup>3</sup> Neil P. Roberts et al., "Early Psychological Intervention Following Recent Trauma: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 10, no. 1 (2019): 1695486.

of gender—and their children requires a connection with organizations and individuals to create a clear vision and collective voice for social and structural change.