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Contact:

Taylr Ucker-Lauderman, Chief Engagement Officer

Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV)

tuckerlauderman@oaesv.org / 216-317-2339

Wednesday Morning Recap: OAESV Spearheads Diverse Opposition to HB 172

Columbus, OH

The Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) is calling attention to the significant and diverse opposition to House Bill 172 presented at Wednesday's hearing in the Ohio House Health Committee. Over 50 opponents testified or submitted written opposition, representing a broad spectrum of survivors, victim advocacy groups, and health care experts. Collectively, these voices brought attention back to the core issue at stake in HB 172 — protecting vulnerable children and ensuring their needs remain at the forefront.

Opponents included:

- Survivors and survivor advocates
- Human trafficking prevention organizations
- State sexual assault and domestic violence prevention coalitions
- Health care professionals
- Mental health providers
- Public health experts
- Social service organizations
- Youth voices and community members from across Ohio

This wide-ranging coalition underscored deep concern about the bill's impact on children experiencing abuse, mental health crises, and other urgent needs.

"If enacted, House Bill 172 would eliminate the six counseling sessions or 30 days of services that minors aged 14 or above can currently access without parental consent or notification. For trafficked youth, this narrow pathway is not a loophole — it is often the only safe, realistic opportunity they have to reach a trained professional," said **Kirsti Mouncey, President and CEO of the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking**. "Closing it would cut off a vital lifeline for youth whose autonomy, communication, and daily movements are often tightly controlled by their trafficker."

"Requiring parental consent prior to all counseling would endanger victims and other vulnerable youth. Most child sexual abuse is committed by someone the child knows — often a parent, guardian, or other family member," said **Emily Gemar, Director of Public Policy at the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence**. "When the abuser is a parent or has influence over the home, requiring that parent's consent for counseling effectively denies the child access to safety, disclosure, and intervention. Confidential counseling is often the first and only setting where a child can safely disclose abuse to a trained professional."

"H. B. 172 eliminates the best route to safety for the children who are most at risk," said **Lisa DeGeeter, Senior Director of Policy and Prevention at the Ohio Domestic Violence Network**. "It reduces child's safety and offender accountability, it extends suffering and allows an abusive parent the opportunity to deny their child a way to heal."

"For clarity, [current law] does not override mandated reporting, prescribe medication, or diminish the essential role of parents," wrote **Rebecca Lancaster, a social worker**. "With time limited support, it is able to build relationships between families and provide a safety net for vulnerable young people who would otherwise be left with no access to mental health support."

Christy Daron, a licensed independent social worker with decades of experience providing behavioral healthcare, described three significant examples from her time providing services to youth under the current law: "The time I was able to spend under the protection of the current law changed the trajectory of the lives of each of these youth. House bill 172 aims to take that away."

While this diverse coalition of opponents highlighted numerous specific harms that could befall children — whether domestic violence survivors, sexual violence survivors, human trafficking survivors, or just children navigating the difficulties of high school, proponents were unable to highlight even one specific harm originating from the confidential crisis mental health care statute.

About 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.