



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact:

Taylr Ucker-Lauderman, Chief Engagement Officer  
Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV)  
[tuckerlauderman@oaesv.org](mailto:tuckerlauderman@oaesv.org) / 216-317-2339

### **Advocates Urge Passage of Senate Bill 421 to Expand Access to Civil Justice for Sexual Violence Survivors**

**COLUMBUS, Ohio** — Survivor advocacy organizations and leaders from across Ohio urged lawmakers today to pass Senate Bill 421, legislation that would extend the civil statute of limitations for adult survivors of sexual violence from one year to five years.

During testimony before the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, representatives from the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV), Cleveland Rape Crisis Center, and Hope & Healing Survivor Resource Center shared that Ohio law must better reflect the realities survivors face.

“Healing and justice do not happen on a predictable timeline,” said Emily Gemar, speaking on behalf of OAESV, the statewide coalition representing Ohio’s rape crisis centers. “Trauma affects every survivor differently, and the law must recognize that reality.”

Current Ohio law gives adult survivors only one year to file a civil lawsuit against the perpetrator. Advocates testified that this timeframe is often far too short for survivors who may spend years processing trauma, securing safety, or deciding whether to pursue legal action.

“Delayed disclosure is a common phenomenon associated with sexual violence,” Gemar told lawmakers. “Trauma can impair memory formation, emotional processing, and a survivor’s ability to speak about what happened. Survivors may fear retaliation, losing relationships — especially when the perpetrator is someone connected to their family, workplace, school, or community.”

Andrew DeFratis, Senior Director of Public Affairs for the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center, testified that the organization’s 24-hour hotline responded to more than 3,700 calls, texts, and chats in 2025 alone. He noted that many survivors reaching out for support are disclosing abuse for the very first time.

“For many different reasons, the average period before a survivor reaches out to us since the harm occurred is more than five years,” DeFratis said. “Every survivor’s healing journey is different, and decisions about whether or not to engage with the legal system are deeply personal.”

Advocates also highlighted the practical and financial burdens survivors often carry long after an assault, including counseling expenses, lost income, medical care, relocation costs, and ongoing mental health impacts.

Teresa Stafford-Wright, CEO of Hope & Healing Survivor Resource Center and a survivor leader, testified that survivors are often discouraged from pursuing civil action while criminal proceedings are ongoing, only to later discover the too-short statute of limitations has expired.

“Far too often, survivors are forced into an impossible choice,” Stafford-Wright said. “Passing SB 421 would allow survivors to pursue both criminal and civil accountability without fear that one process will jeopardize the other.”

Supporters emphasized that Senate Bill 421 does not alter evidentiary standards or due process protections. Instead, they said, the legislation simply provides survivors with more time to pursue accountability through the civil legal system.

“Ohio has already taken meaningful steps to improve responses to sexual violence,” Gemar said, citing investments in rape kit testing, expanded victims’ rights, and extensions to the criminal statute of limitations for rape. “Extending the civil statute of limitations is a logical continuation of those efforts.”

Advocates urged committee members to favorably report Senate Bill 421 and provide survivors with greater access to justice, accountability, and healing.

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### **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 Hope & Healing Survivor Resource Center**

At Hope & Healing Survivor Resource Center, we are committed to the prevention of violence through action and empowerment, and providing trauma-informed services to survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking in Medina and Summit Counties, Ohio.

### **About Cleveland Rape Crisis Center**

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center supports survivors of rape and sexual abuse, promotes healing and prevention and advocates for social change in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, and Ashtabula Counties.