

February 6, 2019

Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of House Bill 2079. As a licensed master social worker who has spent the last ten years advocating on behalf of domestic violence survivors in Kansas, I would like to voice my strong support for this bill.

The Kansas Bureau of Investigation indicates there were 22,708 reported incidents of domestic violence in Kansas in 2017. Additionally, a study from the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that only 25% of domestic violence incidents are reported to law enforcement. Therefore, we can only speculate as to the true number of our fellow Kansans who have been on the receiving end of intimate partner abuse. Unfortunately, sexual violence is all too commonly used as a control tactic within abusive relationships. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports between 40% and 45% of women are sexually assaulted by intimate partners during their relationship. When we consider that information in conjunction with the statistic about underreporting, we can logically conclude that thousands of our neighbors, colleagues, friends, family, and community members are affected by sexual violence within an intimate relationship each year.

Domestic violence is fundamentally rooted in elements of power and control. Perpetrators use a variety of physical, emotional, financial, and sexual tactics to dehumanize, and devalue, their partners. Consequently, survivors often feel unworthy and undeserving. House Bill 2079 sends a clear message to survivors that they are entitled to bodily autonomy, sexual boundaries, and safety, and that a marriage license is not a forfeiture of their basic human rights. I ask that you join us in creating a safer and more just Kansas by restoring dignity to thousands of survivors and supporting House Bill 2079.

Thank you for your time,

Mary Stafford, LMSW