



## Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault

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Testimony from MOCSA's President & CEO Julie Donelon, MSW

IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 150: Enacting housing protections for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking or stalking.

Senate Committee on Judiciary

March 6, 2019

Chairperson Wilborn and Members of the Committee:

My name is Julie Donelon and I am the President & CEO of MOCSA, the Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault, and I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 150 which aims to enact housing protections for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and stalking. I would like to thank Senator Sykes and the bill's sponsors for introducing this important legislation and for prioritizing their support of Kansans who are victims of these violent crimes.

MOCSA works to improve the lives of those impacted by sexual assault and abuse and to prevent sexual violence in our community – the Kansas City metropolitan area. MOCSA serves Wyandotte and Johnson Counties in Kansas, as well as several counties in Missouri. Without supportive services, the trauma of sexual violence can stay with victims for a lifetime. MOCSA provides education to the community, counseling services to victims and their families, and advocacy services to allow victims to more easily navigate the criminal and civil justice systems. In 2018, MOCSA provided 2562 hours of counseling services and 2133 hours of advocacy services to Kansas residents. Additionally, education was provided to 12,425 youth and 13,025 adults in Kansas.

According to the KBI, reports of rape in state of Kansas increased by 8.1% last year, with the highest number of offenses reported since at least 1998. MOCSA's service area of Johnson and Wyandotte Counties still accounts for one of every five reports of rape in the state (Kansas Bureau of Investigation, 2018). Locally, Johnson and Wyandotte county law enforcement officials received 248 reports of rape in 2017, yet the number of requests MOCSA received for hospital advocacy in Kansas for that same year was 288, or 116% of those reported to law enforcement. This trend has continued in 2018, and we project the demand for our services will continue to rise from victims of sexual assault in our Kansas communities.

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We hear from sexual assault survivors every day that access to safe housing is a significant barrier in Kansas. Although it is estimated that 55% of sexual assaults occur within or near the victim's home, there are still no housing protections to assist in their safety plan for access to safe housing (RAINN.org; 2014).

Currently, victims face an array of consequences for breaking their lease because it is no longer safe for them to live in their current housing. If they request to be absolved from their lease or disclose why they are not safe in the home, the landlord or property manager may deny this request or may evict them. Both of these actions tarnish the victim's rental history and makes it more difficult for them to find safe housing in the future. Many survivors that we have worked with have shown supporting documentation to a property manager and requested to be absolved of their lease only to be told "no" - that they are responsible for paying out the rest of their lease agreement or pay a significant sum if they need to end their lease for any reason, violence notwithstanding. The victim is then faced with whether to stay in their home even though it is unsafe and risk being assaulted again in their home or to break the terms of their lease anyway and face a judgement on their credit report or a serious disruption in their rental history - both of which then make it very difficult for them to find new, safer housing in a different location. Some survivors we work with disclose the occurrence of violence to their property manager and are evicted for disclosing that violence occurred in the unit at all - it is still legal in Kansas for a victim to be evicted from one's home because of a sexual assault and we are hopeful that this bill will correct that practice. This bill offers relief - emotionally, socially, and economically, to victims who are simply seeking safety in their home and will prevent future violence.

I strongly urge the Committee to support Senate Bill 150 to better serve Kansas victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking or human trafficking. Thank you for your time and strong consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Julie Donelon, MSW

MOCSA President & CEO