

MOCSA

Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault

February 15, 2021

Dear Chairman Patton and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Victoria Pickering and I am the Director of Advocacy at MOCSA, the Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault. I have been an advocate for victims of sexual and domestic violence for the last 16 years. On behalf of MOCSA, I am testifying today in support of House Bill 2228.

MOCSA is the only rape crisis center serving Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas. Our mission is to improve the lives of those impacted by sexual abuse and assault and to prevent sexual violence in our community – the bi-state Kansas City metropolitan area. MOCSA provides advocacy and counseling services to individuals and families who have been impacted by sexual violence and we work to prevent violence through our education, prevention, and outreach programs.

One of the great privileges I've had in my role at MOCSA and in my career as an advocate is the ability to sit with survivors in the aftermath of trauma, as they take their first steps towards healing. For many survivors, this takes place in a hospital room. In our community, when a survivor goes to the emergency room after a sexual assault, a MOCSA advocate is called to respond, no matter the time of day or night, 365 days a year. I have had the opportunity to provide support to hundreds of survivors over the years and I am always amazed at the strength, courage and vulnerability I see in those hospital rooms. In order to truly understand how important HB 2228 would be for survivors, I think it's important for you to know some basic information about the sexual assault forensic exam, so I will share with you some of the things I share with new advocates when I train them on providing hospital advocacy.

The exams take on average about 3 hours. Sometimes they are faster and other times, you could be at the hospital for 6 or 7 hours. Having an exam done means that a survivor will have to tell not one or two, but many, strangers that they have been sexually assaulted. Having an exam means consenting to having one's body evaluated as a crime scene. Instead of professionals tiptoeing through a room looking for clues, during a sexual assault exam, the victim has to walk the examiner through each detail of the assault in order for all the evidence to be collected. The exam may be very personal, painful and invasive. This process results in what we often refer to as a "kit". The kit is the box full of swabs, hair, fingernail scrapings and other items that may have evidentiary value if a survivor also chooses to report the crime to law enforcement.

3100 Broadway,
Suite 400
Kansas City, MO
64111-2591

Main:
(816) 931-4527

Crisis Line:
(816) 531-0233 MO
(913) 642-0233 KS

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It is with this knowledge in mind that I ask you to consider the merits of HB 2228. This bill would ensure that when a survivor chooses to have an exam and chooses to report the sexual assault to law enforcement, that kit will be submitted to the lab and it will be tested. This bill does not guarantee prosecution or justice, but it does send a strong message of hope to survivors throughout the state of Kansas. This bill tells survivors that we take their trauma seriously.

Survivors of sexual assault have so many things to worry about. They worry about their safety and how their families will react to the news. They worry about what their experience with the criminal justice system will be like. They worry about when they will be able to sleep soundly again. And they worry about whether the evidence that they endured having collected from their bodies will ever see the light of day.

It is truly an incredible opportunity any time we can alleviate even the smallest worry for a survivor and for that reason, I ask that you support HB 2228.

Sincerely,

Victoria Pickering

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