

Chair Hope, Vice Chair Andrews, Vice Chair Fuller, and Honorable Members of the Michigan House Committee on Criminal Justice,

I am testifying in writing today in favor of House Bill 4488 and House Bill 4490. Sexual assault is a crisis in Michigan. I was born and raised in Michigan, and when I was in college, I became active as a volunteer advocate for survivors' rights because sexual violence had impacted the lives of so many of my friends and family members, both on and off campus. As a public high school teacher, I also know that, according to the CDC, 1 in 5 of my female students have experienced sexual violence in the last year alone, and I want my state-level elected officials to fight to protect and support my students.

Whether you know it or not, at least one of your loved ones is a survivor of sexual assault. According to FBI crime data, Michigan has the fourth-highest rate of sexual assault among all 50 U.S. states, and according to the 2020 CDC National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, "over half of women and almost 1 in 3 men have experienced sexual violence involving physical contact during their lifetimes." Nationwide, hospital visits related to sexual assault have increased 1,533% since 2006, and the rate of sexual assault has been rising even more rapidly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And yet, basic civil rights are too often not guaranteed for survivors of sexual assault in Michigan. Instead, survivors are often left to navigate a confusing system without the rights and support that they need. HB 4488 would guarantee survivors the right to have access to an attorney, a sexual assault counselor, and/or a support person of their choice throughout the confusing and retraumatizing experience of reporting a sexual assault. HB 4490 would also provide survivors with the basic right to shower after the administration of a sexual assault forensic evidence exam if shower facilities are available. This common-sense legislation will help provide sexual assault survivors with the support that they deserve.

I am thrilled that HB 4488 and HB 4490 are receiving a hearing before this estimable committee, and I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. This is not a partisan issue, and protections for sexual assault survivors in Michigan are needed now more than ever before. It is within your power to ensure that survivors get the support they deserve in our state - please use that power to advance HB 4488 and HB 4490 today.

Evan Bonsall  
RISE Michigan Volunteer Advocate