

February 6, 2019

Members of the Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of the Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault, I am testifying today in support of House Bill 2079. MOCSA provides advocacy and counseling services to individuals and families who have been impacted by sexual violence in Johnson and Wyandotte counties, and we work to prevent violence through our education and outreach programs. We see firsthand the impact that public policy has on our community, in survivors' experiences as victims of crime, as well as in the societal norms that guide how we respond to sexual violence. It is with both these things in mind that I express my gratitude for the committee's consideration of this bill.

The policies and statutes that govern the criminal justice system in Kansas are a reflection of our priorities and our values. This proposed change to statute is simple and it is long overdue. HB 2079 will remove what is known as a "spousal exemption" from the elements of the crime of sexual battery. The importance of removing this language is both practical and symbolic. Passing HB 2079 sends a clear message to Kansans – that violence is no less harmful when it happens at the hands of someone a victim loves and trusts. It sends the message that the state of Kansas has a vested interest in ensuring that our citizens are safe in their homes. I believe this is a message that truly represents our values and our priorities.

As a society, we have made so much progress over the last fifty years in our understanding of sexual violence and our work to support victims and hold perpetrators accountable. Part of this work has been to break through the myths and misconceptions about sexual violence and shed light on the reality of the problem. We know that sexual assault is more likely be committed by someone a victim knows, and according to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), about 33% of assaults are committed by an intimate partner. In order to adequately respond to violence in our state, we have removed spousal exemptions from almost all sexual offenses and we are proud to support this legislation to remove this remaining vestige of the past.

Sincerely,

Victoria Pickering
Director of Advocacy
MOCSA