

**COMMITTEE TESTIMONY COVER LETTER**

BILL #: HB 2467

Date of Testimony: January 27, 2020

Name of person testifying: Mary Stafford, LMSW

Agency Represented: Community Member

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**PLEASE CHECK ONE:**

Proponent X

Neutral

Opponent

**PLEASE CHECK ONE:**

Speaking & written Testimony X

Written only Testimony

January 27, 2020

Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of House Bill 2467. As a licensed master social worker who has spent over 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 24,066 reported incidents of domestic violence in Kansas in 2018. 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 (NCADV) reports between 40% and 45% of women are sexually assaulted by intimate partners during their relationship. It is important to note, however, that percentage only reflects the number of women who identified their experience as sexual assault. It does not account for the multitude of women who are sexually manipulated, coerced, exploited, or abused by a partner but are reluctant to identify it as an assault. Nevertheless, when we consider the information provided by NCADV 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 their partners and make them feel they are not worthy, deserving, heard, or believed. We add validity to perpetrators' tactics, and further delegitimize survivors' experiences, by allowing a spousal exception in the sexual battery statute. Kansas has long since recognized that rape within the confines of marriage is a crime, and it is past time to establish the same for sexual battery. Permitting the statute to remain as currently written sends a message to perpetrators that they can sexually violate their spouses and will not be held accountable. To the contrary, House Bill 2467 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. What message, as members of the Kansas House of Representatives, do you want to send?

I ask that you join us in creating a safer and more just Kansas by restoring dignity to thousands of survivors, ensuring a fair and equal balance of power within marriages, and supporting House Bill 2467.

Thank you for your time,

Mary Stafford, LMSW