

JULIE
OHIO

Good afternoon Chairman Cates, Ranking Minority Member Sawyer and members of the Education Committee. My name is Julie. I am a student at the Ohio State University and I am in support of House Bill 19. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My testimony comes from a double perspective: as a witness to what is going on in the dating scene of teens and young adults, and as living proof that education works to break the cycle of domestic violence. Despite the efforts of my mother, various attorneys, my therapist, teachers and myself, until the age of 18 I was abused by my father in every way possible. In your copies I have left further information regarding my background of abuse. If you would like to hear more of what happened to me please ask any questions you would like during the question and answer period. For now, it is important to focus on the fact that from my mother and therapist I learned right away, at a very young age, that what was happening to me was wrong, was abusive and should not be tolerated. This awareness separated me from most of those around me who were part of similar abusive experiences with no awareness that it was wrong. Just the opposite, in their minds being treated abusively was becoming appropriate and right.

When I was a sophomore at Lakota East High School I heard Mr. and Mrs. Croucher's presentation. I had never been so impacted by a lesson like this my entire school career. They spoke of the umbrella of domestic violence that can begin as child abuse, turn into bullying and then into dating violence. It was the first time I didn't feel alone. It was the first time that I started to hear my friends open up about their experiences and recognize that they were in a bad relationship or that what was happening to them at home was not right. Emotions poured out among students that day. It became clear to me that, unlike my relationship with my mother at home, most teenagers were not talking to their parents and likewise parents were not talking to their kids about the issue.

Back in elementary school, the bullies used to try and force themselves on the girls, push them up against a fence and kiss them. Luckily I was a tomboy and could defend myself by kicking them. This may sound like cute childhood pranks, but I saw the pain on the faces of the girls who felt violated by what had happened to them. And it wasn't just girls getting hurt or just boys doing the bullying. Both girls and boys had to deal with teasing and taunting on a regular basis. Without the help of anyone to stop this and teach the bully that this was harmful, they continued their patterns through high school and I saw them hurt a lot of people along the way.

In middle and high school I saw it all. A girl I knew got caught up in the glamour of popularity and the boy she was dating. She had a full ride to play for the number one college basketball team in the nation. Her boyfriend, however, started to be possessive, demanding all her time, following her wherever she went. She eventually couldn't take it and wanted out. This is when he date raped her. Nine months later her dreams and her future were shattered, as she became a teen mother. Another instance, a girl who everyone envied met a boy from another school. He transferred schools so he could follow her every move. He emotionally abused her and when she tried to rebel, he turned to physical violence. She would show up at school with bruises and claim they were from soccer practice. She graduated and tried to free herself from him, but he got into the same college as her and she eventually had to get her family involved to protect her and transfer to another state. She is luckier than Tina Croucher. She is alive. But he is still out there. He has a new girlfriend and she may not be so lucky.

These patterns of abuse only get worse at the college level. With Facebook, cell phones, and GPS, it has become easier for a relationship to get out of hand. Stalking through facebook, or using a Blackberry application known as BBM, you can keep tabs on your significant other. People are texted up to 30 times an hour asking: "Where you are?" "Who are you with?" And it's not just girls who are victims...guys are too.

With alcohol involved at the collegiate level, violence increases. One night, my then boyfriend and I had been at a party. He got jealous when I spoke to other guys. He was drunk and started to call me every vulgar name in the book, pushing me up against the wall by my neck, yelling one inch from my face. Thankfully people were around to get him off of me. It's sometimes the people you least suspect. He had always been a caring, loving guy. Needless to say, I ended things with him that night because I knew this was a red flag.

At Ohio State, I am around some of the best and brightest people with such promising futures, but I see them getting sidetracked in their education and in their goals in life. I try to help these people understand, to make them aware, but many times my attempts are futile. I fear that some of my friends and their future children are headed for the devastating and debilitating past that I endured. Because the destructive patterns are engrained, acceptable, and even comfortable to the victims, it makes it hard for them to leave the relationship. It is why one out of three teens is affected by dating abuse, because they were never educated otherwise.

My mother's and my education came the hard way, and helping ourselves out of it was made extremely challenging due to ignorance, the lack of awareness, and sadly to say, those who were aware, but didn't believe it or chose not to do anything. Through our uphill battle we broke the cycle of domestic violence that was occurring with us.

I am the generation where education and campaigns have made a difference in making sure we are safe: we fasten our seat belts, smoking isn't cool, and we make sure there is a designated driver. I appreciate all those efforts that have been made to protect us. Although common knowledge, simple laws like those have helped to save lives. Just like I am hoping to urge you to do today. The time is here and the time is now that we need the tools to keep us safe in our relationships, where most of the harm can happen to a person.

Thank you Chairman Cates and members of the committee for allowing me to speak. I am happy to answer any questions you have.

My Background of Abuse

The abuse that I endured was at the hands of my own father and it lasted my entire childhood.

My mother was a few years into her marriage when she learned that what was happening was domestic violence and that there was no way she could stop it no matter how hard she tried.

My mother, as an adult, had the right to leave that abusive situation through divorce. I was barely a year old at the time, but I didn't have the same rights because I was a child. The court system that controlled me did not realize that when an abuser can't get to his spouse he will get to his children. I got a first hand education.

Over the years I was forced by the courts to visit him, no matter how much I spoke up that he was hurting me in every way possible. I faced a legal system that seemed to value a parent's right to torture offspring over a child's right to grow up unscarred. I could not understand why a genetic relationship gave him a right to do things that if it had been any one else (like a soccer coach) would have put that person behind bars. Maybe the courts didn't want to believe that because of who he was he couldn't possibly do the things I was saying: he's a prominent businessman, a former (Canfield) city councilman and a rotary club president.

It took until I was ten years old for a judge to finally listen to me and stop the visitations. But that didn't stop the abuse. For the next eight years he stalked me through the courts. He had the right to use the legal system to harass me, cause me devastating emotional pain, and drain our family financially. I was granted a five year restraining order against him when I was 15, which he violated. Unbelievably even with a restraining order against him he was still able to file for visitation and drag us through the courts until I graduated from high school. My scars run deep.