

House Bill 167 Key Talking Points

Summary

HB 167 would create important employment and housing protections for domestic violence survivors including:

- Prohibiting adverse employment actions and discrimination in hiring.
- Requiring workplace accommodations including unpaid leave.
- Prohibiting adverse leasing actions such as terminating leases.
- Allowing domestic violence survivors to terminate leases, get locks changed, or transfer units within public housing.

Talking Points

Calls are needed to the committee members of the Senate Judiciary – Civil Justice Committee (<http://www.ohiosenate.gov/committees/standing/detail/judiciary-civil-justice.html>). The following are key points to cover:

1. **Jobs & Housing are key to safety.** Many people ask “why does she stay or go back?” Housing and employment are two of the most key resources domestic violence survivors need to escape violent partners. When battered women can’t get or keep a job or a place to live, they are at high risk to have to return to their abusive partners.
2. **We shouldn’t hold victims back.** Victims of domestic violence should not be re-victimized by losing their apartments or jobs because of their abusers’ actions or discriminatory actions by their employers or landlords.
3. **These are well-recognized strategies.** Governor Strickland’s 2008 Executive Order provides various employment protections and accommodations for state employees who are victims of domestic violence and sets an excellent example for other employers to emulate. Some private employers—notably, Chase Bank, Nationwide, Liz Claiborne, and Verizon Wireless, among many others—have successfully implemented similar policies. However, these policies remain the exception rather than the rule in Ohio. But if HB 167 is enacted, Ohio would join 26 other states that offer housing protection and 15 other states that offer employment protection to victims of domestic violence (some of these statutes offer even more relief than proposed in HB 167).
4. **Ignoring domestic violence in the workplace doesn’t reduce its impact.** The costs of unaddressed domestic violence in productivity, health care claims, and security issues are well known. HB 167 would help employers create an environment where employees can come forward and seek assistance, allowing employers to respond appropriately to ensure that domestic violence does not impact employees, or their bottom line. When victims fear termination for disclosing domestic violence, all the negative impacts continue on in the workplace, and potentially dangerous situations can escalate.
5. **Workplace domestic violence policies are good for business; they won’t hurt small businesses.** HB 167 provides limited, but important, legal protections and remedies for victims of domestic violence while minimizing the impact to employers and landlords. In this economy, people are understandably worried about the impact on business, especially small businesses. In addition to bringing benefits to employees, HB 167 will not harm small businesses because:

- a. The bill only applies to companies which employ 25 or more employees, thus excluding small employers. Only medium-sized and larger employers would be subject to the employment provisions of HB 167.
- b. The “reasonable accommodation” provision of HB 167 provides flexibility to employers to provide a specific, reasonable response to an employee’s request for an accommodation. The bill specifies that “no reasonable accommodation shall require any action that increases risks to other persons, nor shall any reasonable accommodation impose any undue hardship or substantial cost on the employer.”
- c. Many of the “reasonable accommodations” companies can provide will cost little or nothing. These include things like changing the abused employee’s parking space, schedule or phone extension, and alerting security to the issue.

6. **HB 167 would reduce the costs and impact of domestic violence.** According to research conducted by the Anthem Foundation of Ohio and the Health Policy Institute of Ohio, domestic violence costs Ohio billions of dollars in direct and indirect costs. Each year, Ohio spends over \$1.1 billion on direct costs to address family violence, including expenditures for medical care for victims, shelters for battered women, and other social services. Indirect costs for intimate partner violence and child abuse exceed \$2.2 billion annually. These costs are a significant drain on Ohio taxpayers, social service agencies, employers, and victims’ families. HB 167 will reduce those economic costs by making it easier for victims of domestic violence to escape their abusers, implement effective safety plans, and attain economic self-sufficiency. The relief proposed would be a win-win for survivors, employers, landlords, and taxpayers. Any short-term costs or burdens on employers or landlords—which should be minimal or nonexistent in most cases—will be outweighed by these long-term benefits. Moreover, when victims lose their jobs, the results go beyond keeping them in abusive relationships. They also include increased costs to the State in the form of public assistance expenses such as Medicaid, food stamps, and further depleting of the already bankrupt unemployment compensation fund.

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