

Hanna Johnson - Testimony In Support of SB 2387

Thank you Chairwoman Lee, Vice Chairman Weston, and Members of the Human Services Committee for reviewing my testimony for SB 2387. My name is Hanna Johnson and I am a fifth-generation North Dakotan, and I was raised on a farm in small-town North Dakota. But, most relevant to today's hearing, I am also a survivor of sexual violence.

After I was assaulted, I was overwhelmed with what had happened to me and uncertain about how to proceed. I did not know what rights I had under the law and I had no idea where to turn. But, I knew I had to create something positive out of something so terrible – it's the North Dakotan way. So, I took note of the lessons of community support that I learned growing up on a farm in small-town North Dakota, and vowed to help take care of other victims to help them feel more supported after their trauma.

I began that vow to help other victims like me by working on language that would codify protections for survivors in North Dakota that would work well with what already exists in the state, not have a fiscal note, and have the potential to help support victims through their assault by supporting them afterwards. Notably, this legislation does not infringe on the rights of the accused, and it seeks to help medical providers and police officers better support victims through these difficult moments too.

Through eighteen months of revising this language with on-the-ground coalitions in North Dakota, including the Central Dakota Forensic Nurse Examiners, the Children's Advocacy Centers of North Dakota, and the North Dakota Domestic & Sexual Violence Coalition, I have found healing and justice. Through researching these rights that I wish I would have had and speaking to other survivors in North Dakota and beyond about things that they wish they would have had, I spoke to many victims who did not feel comfortable disclosing their experiences, but I carry their stories with me today in their honor.

I support this bill because I believe that current and future victims in North Dakota deserve to have these rights codified in our state. Every victim, regardless of if they are in a city or a rural area, and across any corner of our state, should be afforded the same protections after their assault.

Below is a short summary of the reasons that I support each bill item:

- The right to consult with a victim advocate when available is already a best practice in our state, and codifying it helps ensure access to all victims by helping them be aware of the protections they have after an assault. Medical exams can be invasive and traumatic, but the presence of a victim advocate can be soothing in this time of distress, which is so important after trauma.
- The right to bring a victim's privately-retained counsel when speaking with law enforcement enables victims to bring their own attorneys into a police interview to help them feel more supported when disclosing the details of their assault, which is hard for so many people to do.
- The right to access a law enforcement report for victims over the age of 18 if it wouldn't hinder an investigation allows victims to gain the documentation they may need for various reasons, including civil suits, that may not be able to wait until a criminal case is closed.
- The right to a document explaining the unique rights of victims of sexual violence is important because it builds off the general crime victims' rights card established in Marsy's Law, but expands it to include details for sexual assault survivors, which is extremely important for

survivors in crisis and helps police officers and medical providers easily inform victims of their rights. Easy access to information like having a no-cost rape kit, local resources, protections, results of medical evidentiary exams, and retention of these rights without a police report are necessary for survivors to understand their rights as a victim.

On behalf of the 125,000 survivors in North Dakota and all future victims who would be positively impacted by this legislation, I ask that you give SB 2387 a DO PASS recommendation.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. It is an honor to share a piece of my story with you today.