

HB2536.Caitlin Ryan.2-8-22.Pro

Thank you Chair and Members of the Committee for allowing me to address you. My name is Caitlin Ryan. I join today on behalf of Rise, as an ally to survivors, and as a woman affected by the tremors of sexual violence.

On January 21, 2017, I helped organize the largest single-day mass protest in the history of the United States. The Women's March brought together women and allies from all backgrounds, political persuasions, and religions from all around the world to stand together against misogyny, against violence, and against hatred. For many, the Women's March helped us feel a little less alone. A little less helpless. A little bit stronger.

That same evening as I was dismissing the last group of volunteers, one of the volunteers on my team, a man at least 30 years older than me, forcibly pulled me toward him and kissed me on the lips. I did not consent to or welcome this action. I was visibly uncomfortable and humiliated in front of other volunteers who had looked up to me. Suddenly, after a day of feeling so empowered, I felt alone and so small. My strength was gone.

I'd known this feeling before. I first learned what rape was when I was 11 years old, in the fifth grade. While kicking around a soccer ball after school, my good friend confided in me that on a recent family vacation, she was raped in a hotel room. That feeling of helplessness set in right away—my friend was in pain. And there was nothing I could do to make things right for her.

It was this sinking, powerless feeling I've felt in my stomach every time since then when I've heard from another friend, classmate, or co-worker who has experienced sexual violence and has walked the long, lonely road toward justice.

But I'm here today because I now know I am not helpless. We are not helpless. We can support survivors, starting by breaking down the barriers faced by survivors in the justice system. Today, survivors face immense challenges from a system that re-victimizes them when they seek basic care and justice. Today I urge you to support HB 2536. This bill presents an opportunity to improve conditions for survivors like my childhood friend, and the survivors you have heard from today.

Access to justice shouldn't depend on your zip code, and survivors everywhere deserve basic rights, such as the right to be informed of their rights as a survivor, to consult with a counselor, and to a shower at no cost after an intrusive examination. Through this bill, you have the opportunity to join statehouses around the country and improve conditions for the more than 592,000 survivors in Kansas. Thank you for your time and consideration.