

February 2, 2023

Honorable Senator Christopher West  
James Senate Office Building, Room 303  
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB27 – Criminal Procedure - Restorative Justice Program

Dear Senator West and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Members:

First, I want to thank you for the opportunity to share my story and perspective around Restorative Justice. I wholeheartedly believe in the good of this program, and the healing it can provide to both victims and offenders.

On the evening of July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009, I was tucked into bed and promised breakfast in bed for my birthday in the morning. I was almost asleep when I heard a loud knock on the front door of our rural home. My mom went to answer and the next thing I heard was screaming. I locked myself in my room and called 911 not knowing who was in my house. Then there was arguing, glass shattering, and finally a loud bang. It didn't take long for me to realize the person in my house was my estranged step-father and that the loud bang I heard was a gunshot.

I am not going to pretend that the healing process has been easy or straightforward. My mother is gone and there is nothing I can do about it. I have done so many things to try to fill the hole left in my heart, heal the PTSD, and move on with my life. It took me years to understand that I will never move on with my life, but instead I needed to learn to move forward.

The Restorative Justice Program has been a critical part in my journey to find peace in what happened to me, and my family. The thoughtful, robust, and thorough approach taken within the program helped me feel empowered and find courage I didn't know I had. Without Restorative Justice, I wouldn't have been able to face my stepfather, ask him questions and tell him that I forgive him. Simply put, I would have never been able to benefit from this part of healing without Restorative Justice. I am not a victim, but a survivor; and every survivor deserves the chance to move forward.

Sincerely,

Devyn O'Neill  
Restorative Justice Wisconsin Program Participant  
Domestic Violence Survivor