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PREPARED TESTIMONY of Lauren Libby
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Implementation of the Survivors' Bill of Rights Act

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Chairman Sensenbrenner, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today to discuss the Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights Act. I myself am a sexual assault survivor. However, like many of the 25 million survivors in the United States, my rape occurred the passage of this Act, and I was unable to seek justice through the criminal justice system. My work on this legislation will have no impact on my rape case. However, what I wish to speak to you about today has little or nothing to do with my rape.

In the winter of 2015, while I was sitting at my desk at work, I sent out an email to Amanda Nguyen, simply asking what I can do to help. I had no background in politics. The last time I had spoken publicly about something was in my eighth grade school play. However, in a matter of days, with Amanda encouragingly sitting on the phone with me, I was spoke with Massachusetts legislators, explaining to them why we needed to preserve untested rape kits for at least 15 years. As a rape survivor, I had seen how policies had hindered me from seeking justice and from protecting other women from my rapist. However, by working with Rise, I also came to realize that I had the power to change these policies. In other words, Rise transformed me from simply a rape survivor, into an organizer with a powerful voice.

In the following months, I worked with Amanda and our small team of organizers to move our Survivor Rights bill through the Massachusetts State House. By October 2016, I watched as the same Sexual Assault Survivor Bill of Rights was signed into federal law. A mere week later, Governor Baker signed this same legislation, codifying civil rights in the same state where I had been raped. In less than a year, I had helped pass two laws.

What happened from then on was nothing short of extraordinary. Amanda encouraged me and other members of the Rise team to become organizing coaches. As requests from survivors, legislators and allies came pouring in, I began working with new volunteers, or Risers as well call them, guiding them through the process of penning their own civil rights into existence. The pride that I felt upon the passage of my own Massachusetts bill somehow doubled as I witnessed some of our first Risers, Jennifer Li and Flannery Houston, speak on the California State Assembly floor to advocate for their own civil rights, and eventually pass their own state laws. Three weeks ago, one of our Risers, Abby Haglage, spoke at a press

conference in front of legislators from New York State to announce the creation of a new bill that would amend New York's evidence retention laws from from 30 days--the worst in the nation--to 20 years.

In total, Rise has passed 12 laws for 9 states and 2 countries, the United States and Japan. It is rare that advocates have the opportunity to work of a piece of legislation and see it pass into law. Now imagine being able to replicate that experience to help other organizers pass this same legislation 9 times over. That's the sort of impact our Risers have been able to create over the past two years.

My undying resolve toward passing this bill of rights, and belief in the transformative power that these rights can bring, stems back to my experience working on this federal bill, right here in this very building. I remember sitting with a group of survivors in the Rayburn cafeteria, waiting for our next meeting with members of the House Judiciary Committee. As we huddled around a table, one woman turned to me and said,

“I don't know if you feel this way, but when I heard about the Survivor Bill of Rights, that was the first time I felt hope. This was the first time since my assault I felt that things could change for the better.”

This statement sticks with me, because it perfectly encapsulates how I felt the first time I began working on this legislation. When I saw Congress vote unanimously to pass the Survivor Bill of Rights, I realized that this bill was more than policy. By passing this bill as model legislation for the rest of the country to follow, The Sexual Assault Survivor Bill of Rights Act represents the possibility for change. This idea is drives me to work on legislation every single day. By passing this bill, Congress has provided the rest of the nation with a blueprint for hope. This is what will guide organizers and legislators forward as we move to pass this legislation in the remaining 41 states. Thank you.