

Kaneeka Dalton Paul
H.B. 137
Proponent Testimony

Good afternoon Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze and members of the Criminal Justice Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to testify in front of you all today as a proponent of House Bill 137, which seeks to mandate all county and municipal peace officers to report child abuse and neglect.

According to the Ohio Colleges of Medicine Government Resource Center. *The Scope of Family Violence in Ohio: Ohio Family Violence Prevention Project* each year in Ohio, more than 65,000 women were abused by an intimate partner in the home, and more than 48,000 kids witnessed this type of violence.

When a child witnesses' violence in the home it changes their very being. Most will have symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD can affect their ability to learn, which has the ability to affect their confidence and status in life, *for the rest of their lives*. What happens when a child cannot concentrate in school? Often times it leads to getting in trouble and then perpetuating the school to prison pipeline. I have never seen this more as I did when volunteering in the Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center years before being awarded a grant by the Department of Homeland Security to assist in reducing their recidivism. Those young men and women in there are *hurting*. Many wrote in personal stories and letters to me about watching their mother being abused and having no way to deal with everything that comes along with it. Walking past their mother on the corner engaged in sex

trafficking while on their way to school and then be expected to show up with a positive attitude and ready to learn.

I could talk about them or give you stories all day. However, today I am going to make it a bit more personal and share with you the journey of myself and my childhood best friend.

From as far back as I can remember events from my childhood, I can remember seeing my mother being abused by men in her life. Sometimes these men were romantic partners, other times they were “dope boys” coming to collect whatever it was that they were owed. I remember calling the police starting at age four and continuing through elementary to report incidents of violence in the home. I can remember a time when the police came to the door after I called because my mother was being held upside down and choked while having a sawed off shot gun to her head before being pushed and kicked down the basement steps, all of course as I watched. I remember vividly the police asking me what happened as I described every detail. Not only was the man who was doing this not arrested, I was left there in daily fear for my mother, and myself. To this day, I cannot watch violent or action movies.

Most would say, “But Kaneeka, you are fine today”. However, “*fine*” is relative and not everyone’s story is the same.

Right now, the opioid epidemic is a really hot button topic. Imagine, a child calling 9-1-1 after finding their mother overdosed on the couch. Police and medics come, the mother is revived but taken to the hospital and the child left with neighbors. The mother returns home

only to fall back into her addicted ways before eventually being murdered by a drug dealer in front of that child. That is exactly the story of one of my childhood best friends. I watched him turn from a shy, somewhat withdrawn young boy to aggressively ripping every head off of my Barbies while playing. Eventually, haunted by his own demons and faced with becoming a father himself, he killed his pregnant girlfriend when we were just teens. He recalled on multiple occasions how his life might have been differently had he grown up in a different environment.

Now, I want you to imagine how things could go when we are doing right by our children and families. What if officers would have been mandated to report the call and conditions to a child protection agency when my best friend called after finding that his mother overdosed on the couch? There are a lot of questions we will never know the answers to. However, we can't be willing to gamble? It can't be enough to say perhaps the child will be okay and perhaps we should be mandating everyone Are *we* willing to gamble with the future of our babies?

I support House Bill 137 because it's the right thing to do; for our babies, for their future and for our state. It just requires another entity on the side of children, and who can be opposed to that?

Chairman Manning and Committee, thank you for your time and I welcome questions should you have any.