



Hello my name is Rose Richardson Executive Director of OffenderWatch Initiative and I'm responsible for increasing public awareness through the grass-root efforts of education, community awareness, and increased government interaction.

In partnership with law enforcement, OffenderWatch Initiative mails millions of community notification postcards nationwide every year alerting citizens of sex offenders living in their neighborhoods. We are the only service that receives information directly from law enforcement.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to you about Erin's Law. I believe this law to be extremely important for all citizens in Ohio. Public schools expend a great deal of effort highlighting drug abuse awareness, but not so much with sex abuse. Why is this? In my opinion, sexual abuse should be just as important an issue as drug abuse. Statistics show that:

- *1 in 4 girls is sexually abused before the age of 18.*
- *1 in 7 boys is sexually abused before the age of 18.*
- *1 in 3 children will report the incident.*
- *80% of the population lives within a mile of a registered sex offender.*
- *75% of victims/survivors know their attacker.*
- *Sex offenders move an average of 3 times per year.*

As director I want to make sure the children in every community understand they can and will be heard. Erin's Law would pave the way for our kids to understand this issue. If something is happening to a child he/she should know it's safe to speak up. The OffenderWatch Initiative is here to help as each school should be.

Citizens in your state want to know the whereabouts of sex offenders and also want to help law enforcement monitor their behavior. Ohio has led the way in providing email notifications on sex offenders, having established one of the first state-wide email notification programs in the country. In Franklin County alone we have 44,103 households signed up for email notifications on sex offenders. State wide over 400,000 receive notification. Citizens throughout Ohio recognize the importance of awareness concerning sex offenders. Erin's Law would help establish a platform to provide education in our schools that would help parents convey the importance of this awareness to their children as well.

I'm expediting a program being utilized in other communities that helps tie together the awareness features of Erin's law with email notification programs such as the one we have in Ohio. Classroom time is devoted to instructing children how to interact with their parents in identifying offenders in their neighborhood. Instruction sheets are provided to schools to give the students who bring it home to their parents. The students bring a map back to their class showing the offenders in their area after having discussed with their parents why it is important to know this information and what to do if approached by an offender. The ability to print a map is a free service provided on every sheriff's website in Ohio that allows citizens to know their area.

To tell a child "don't talk to strangers" is confusing and often ignored. If, however, you show a child a few pictures of known "Bad Strangers" this is something that a child can grasp and remember. There are many examples of how this concept can help the community "keep an eye" on these offenders and prevent future abuse. In one case a little girl pointed out to her mother that the offender in question was following their bus every day. This offender was a probation pedophile who was not to have contact with children. He was arrested and sent back to jail BEFORE further abuse occurred. These programs work and should be supported by all of us entrusted with the public good.

Thank you Representative Hagan, Representative Ramos and all the legislators for giving me the opportunity to speak on this issue.

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