

Ohio House Education & Career Readiness Committee  
December 12, 2017  
House Bill 377  
Proponent Testimony

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education & Career Readiness Committee: My name is Phyllis Carlson-Riehm and I am representing ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women, a statewide domestic violence coalition. On behalf of ACTION OHIO, I am submitting this testimony in support of the passage of House Bill 377.

**House Bill 377 will benefit Ohio children** by helping them gain an understanding of personal physical boundaries and provide them with words and actions to guide their responses if and when an individual seeks to violate them and attempt sexual abuse or sexual violence.

**House Bill 377 will help school personnel:**

- 1) To recognize signs that a child may be a victim of sexual abuse,
- 2) To take next steps that will confirm suspicions or not,
- 3) To comply with mandatory child abuse reporting,
- 4) To help children and families connect with resources for treatment and healing, and
- 5) To prevent more children from becoming victims.

**House Bill 377 will:**

- Require school districts, community schools and STEM schools to provide annual age-appropriate instruction in child sexual abuse prevention for grades kindergarten through six;
- Require school districts, community schools and STEM schools to include age-appropriate instruction in sexual violence prevention education for grades seven through twelve;
- Require the Department of Education to provide on its website links to free curricula addressing sexual violence prevention to assist schools in developing their curricula;
- Require school districts, educational service centers, community schools and STEM schools to incorporate training on child sexual abuse into its required in-service training for teachers and other professionals.

**Lack of knowledge about child sexual abuse prevention makes children vulnerable to being abused.** But knowledge needs to be conveyed in an age appropriate way by a person who has been trained to present the subject to children.

**Darkness to Light** is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to empower adults to prevent child sexual abuse. The organization promotes its **adult education program called Stewards of Light**. This program would be ideal for school districts and others to adopt for its personnel. It prepares adults to know the words to use and the most appropriate approach for teaching children.

**The facts are:**

- 90% of children who are victims of sexual abuse know their abuser,
- 30% of children who are sexually abused are abused by a family member,
- 60% of children who are sexually abused are abused by people the family trusts,
- 40% of children who are sexually abused are abused by older, or more powerful children,
- 10% or less of children who are sexually abused are abused by a stranger.

(Reference: Darkness to Light)

Various research studies have indicated the incidence of child sexual abuse, which ranges from 1 in 10 children, 1 in 5 to 7 girls and 1 in 20 to 25 boys. In any case, all too many children experience one or several forms of child sexual abuse. In many cases, it is a crime of opportunity. And the stereotype of the stranger molesting children in most abuse cases is false. The extent of the trauma from the experience can vary greatly, but clearly trauma is greatest when the perpetrator is someone the child loves, depends on and respects. **Minimizing opportunities for the crime to occur and recognizing types of grooming behavior are key factors to preventing child sexual abuse.**

Child sexual abuse involves more than touching.

**Child sexual abuse includes:**

- Any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors when one exerts power over the other,
- Forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act,
- Non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or internet.

(Ref: D2L)

**Consequences of child sexual abuse may be evident while the victim is being abused, after the abuse has stopped and even far into adulthood if there has been no disclosure and treatment.**

Effects may include: post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression, substance abuse, aggression, sexual promiscuity, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy and motherhood, self-inflicted harm, and delinquency. (Ref: D2L)

**Only about one-third of child sexual abuse incidents are identified and fewer are reported to authorities. (Ref: D2L) Many people bear the scars of child sexual abuse as adults. The outpouring of responses to the #Me too campaign is an indication of long-lasting unresolved trauma – for many women and men.**

It is the responsibility of caring adults to do everything possible to protect children and prevent them from experiencing child sexual abuse. House Bill 377 is a positive step towards helping Ohio's children get the support they need if they are already victims, and the bill is a positive step towards preventing child sexual abuse as well as sexual violence in teen and adult years. Victimization as a child often paves the way for victimization in adulthood (as a domestic violence, rape or human trafficking victim).

Please support passage of this bill. Thank you for your consideration of these viewpoints.

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