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*Vice Chair* of Energy and Natural Resources  
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**State Representative Christina M. Hagan**  
Ohio House District 50

**House Bill 377**  
**Education and Career Readiness Committee**  
**December 12, 2017**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, it is my honor to provide sponsor testimony on Erin's Law, House Bill 377. Erin Merryn is an author and activist who was the victim of one of the worst crimes against humanity that a child can experience, brutal and continuous sexual abuse. No child should be robbed of their innocence, it is our job to educate and protect children in all possible ways from such harm.

After Ms. Merryn reached out to me with her personal story, I realized that her heartbreaking testimony is necessary in a world where so much evil exists. This story was unfortunately all too familiar, as Erin told me about the hell she had experienced my heart felt for every child who has been tortured and abused. My own mother experienced such ill fate as a child during her adolescence when her drunken step-father would stumble into the front door and linger in her bedroom. There are some things in this world that can not be reversed, can never be completely healed but can in some circumstances be prevented or reduced through the power of education.

Erin Merryn has made her life's work about saving children from the evil that exists by making her mission education about sexual abuse in America. She has been honored for her service as Woman of the Year, in 2012, by GLAMOUR magazine because "she has taken her personal crusade and turned it into a public one." Erin has been recognized nationally as a leader on this issue by Oprah, MSNBC, CNN, TIME magazine, USA Today, FOX and many more news sources. She has spoken at high schools, colleges, sexual assault centers, and child abuse conferences, the United States Department of Education, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, fundraisers, and community events. She is dedicated to the work of over 900 Children's Advocacy Centers in America to help children heal. Erin believes everyone is born with a purpose and she found her purpose through the pain that has taken place in her life. She decided at a young age to take a stand against evil and instead expose it to put a silent epidemic in the spotlight and be a voice for the voiceless.

This legislation that we are putting forth helps to achieve one of Erin's many goals. She has a vision to educate children in hopes of lessening occurrences of sexual abuse, and accessing available counseling and resources when they have been sexually abused. Each local school district would

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have the freedom to elect age-appropriate instruction in child sexual abuse prevention in the district's or school's health curriculum for students in grades kindergarten through sixth. In light of sexual violence that occurs at all ages and in cases, as recent to Ohio as the 2012 Steubenville High School rape case. Students need resources to prevent such from reoccurring and also need to know there are resources available to help those whom have become the victims of sexual assault. This information is important because survivors are often discouraged from reporting sex crimes because of a lack for perceived support or fear of ridicule. The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault cites studies estimating that as many as 84 percent of cases nationwide are never reported to police. More than 11 percent of high school girls have been forcibly raped, according to one of the statistics compiled by 1is2MANY initiative. The same initiative states about one in every five female college students becomes a victim of sexual violence during her time at college. A silent epidemic exists.

Erin's Law has now been passed into law to protect and educate children in 20 states. Ohio is just one of the many states pending approval and passage. We are very hopeful that Ohio can accomplish this goal in 2015 to help advance Erin's vision of educating our youth in all 50 states. We would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

