



**Proponent testimony submitted to the
Ohio House Health Committee
House Bill 321
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Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence
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Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and Members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 321. As Ohio's statewide coalition, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) advocates for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services and empowers communities to prevent sexual violence.

Over 42 million survivors of childhood sexual abuse live in the United States. Three million of those survivors are still children. One in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys experiences sexual abuse before they turn 18, and just over one-third of those children disclose. Most survivors are abused by someone they know. Perpetrators are able to facilitate abuse because our culture keeps so many of us in the dark about what symptoms sexual abuse produces in children.

As this committee knows, House Bill 321 ("Erin's Law") seeks to require age-appropriate sexual abuse education to children in grades K-6, and sexual violence instruction to grades 7-12. Erin's law would additionally require schools to train teachers on sexual abuse prevention and the Ohio Department of Education to provide model curricula for schools on these topics.

OAESV supports Erin's Law because it is the most logical and effective approach. Every aspect of our work, from prevention to advocacy, to legal representation and community technical assistance and training, informs our decision to zealously advocate for Erin's Law in Ohio.

In addition to those reasons, I support House Bill 321 as a former teacher who saw first-hand the devastation sexual abuse has on very young children. After college, I moved to Washington, D.C. as a Teach For America Corps Member assigned to a four-year-old classroom. My first public charter school provided a mere one hour of instruction on child abuse and mandatory reporting. This was completely insufficient, and I was woefully ill equipped to detect the symptoms of child sexual abuse or address trauma in my classroom. Though my students were only four and five-years-old, we still had academic benchmarks. Restrictions on addressing trauma through developmentally appropriate

instruction models allowed continued disruptions that significantly reduced instruction time on more traditional topics.

After a full year of trying to persuade the administration to adopt Second Step, a social emotional curriculum, and sexual abuse response protocols beyond a CPS call, I left and went to a different school. On the very first day of teacher training, my new principal said something that still rings true – your classroom is every student’s safe space. No matter what is going on at home, you can give them eight hours of calm, and hopefully happiness. As most teachers know, that safe, calm space requires skill and patience to achieve, especially when some students are enduring the trauma of abuse. However, it’s what we owe every child – and it’s what House Bill 321 can help us provide.

When I moved to Ohio, I was shocked to find pushback against Erin’s Law. As I am aware, opponents argue that conversations about sexual abuse should take place at home. First, many victims are sexually abused by the very people who would have to facilitate those conversations. Second, anxiety, confusion, and discomfort would lead many parents to avoid this topic. Third, the State of Ohio cannot go into homes to make sure these conversations are taking place. Relying on families to implement sexual violence prevention and education leaves children vulnerable to further abuse.

Developmentally appropriate sexual abuse curriculum and traditional academic achievement are not mutually exclusive – there is space and time for both in our schools. Developmentally appropriate instruction will help students identify abuse. It will help us get children the resources they need to recover, and will help prevent further harm. Erin’s Law will reduce sexual violence, and lay the foundation for long-term impact on survivors through early detection and intervention.

Erin’s Law must pass. Our children are at stake, and we have no other choice.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. OAESV strongly encourages passage of House Bill 321. I am available to answer your questions today or by email at ccrary@oaesv.org.