

Written Proponent Testimony

HB 321

Erin's Law

Require Age-Appropriate Sexual Abuse and Violence Instruction

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Chief Executive Officer, Haven of Hope

Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee. My name is Michelle Carpenter and I am the Chief Executive Officer at the Haven of Hope. The Haven of Hope is a nonprofit victim advocacy center in Cambridge, OH. We provide direct trauma informed services to all victims of crime in Guernsey and Noble Counties. I have been employed with the agency since 1996 and continue to provide direct services to victims of crime and their families.

Today, I am here to support "Erin's Law", or House Bill 321. I have had the honor of providing trauma informed services to more than 20,000 crime victims in my 23 years as a Victim Advocate. I have had the privilege of meeting extraordinary people who have had the most unimaginable things happen to them. In my experience, being sexually assaulted is one of the most heinous things that can happen to someone. I have provided outreach education to middle school and high school students at Rolling Hills School District for over 20 years as part of a dating violence/date rape curriculum in their health classes. I am here to tell you many of the children do not have any knowledge of sexual assault until we meet them their 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. I always have a staff member attend these education sessions with me so one of us is able to continue the presentation while the other is assisting a victim who has just realized what has been happening to them is not ok. This has happened more times than it ever should. We are able to give tough information to children that meets their age level and experience. I am here to tell you that it works, it helps and it is necessary to stop sexual abuse before it happens or at the very least right after it has started.

Many victims do not report right away for a long list of reasons that fit their situation. Some of those reasons are they don't think they will be believed, they don't know that sexual abuse is wrong or illegal, they don't know who to tell that they are being abused and they believe that they have caused it somehow. We can teach children what sexual abuse is, what it may look like in their families, the types of safe people they can tell and MOST importantly that they will be believed if they tell their story. Children learn from their families what is right and what is wrong. If their family member is the person that is harming them they may not realize that until someone tells them. Children today have so many ways to be victimized. The internet and social media has been the perfect breeding ground for enticing children. We must be able to give them the right information and ways to increase their safety while using these forms of communication. I have learned a lot about these types of victimization from the very students in our presentation. Sometimes the only safe place a child has is in school. We can reach them while they are there and work with the schools to address this important issue.

Children are resilient and I have met so many brave children and adults who have been sexually abused. They have stated that if they had known sooner that it was wrong, that the threats to kill them or their

loves ones could be stopped, that love should not hurt, and that they would have been believed they would have told sooner. We owe it to our youth to arm them with this information so they can live free of violence and become who they want to be without having trauma decide for them.

For these reasons and in my experience I am asking you to pass Erin's Law in Ohio so that we may make a difference in our future by taking care of our most vulnerable population.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you have today or by email at [michelle@havenofhope.org](mailto:michelle@havenofhope.org).

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