

May 19, 2020

Ohio House Education Committee

Proponent Testimony HB 321

Erin's Law

Submitted by: Rebecca Surendorff

Chairman Jones, Vice Chairwoman Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for opportunity to provide testimony as an Ohio parent and concerned citizen on House Bill 321, Erin's Law.

Erin Law has been passed in 37 states including Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. The curriculum mandated in Erin's Law provides age appropriate child sexual abuse prevention education. All children in Ohio whether in public, charter or parochial schools deserve the protection of informed peers, teachers and families – the same protection children in the majority of schools across the country receive.

Last summer, while attending Sunday mass with my four school age children, I learned that the pastor of our church and school community was placed on leave due to possible violations of the Child Protection Decree in our religious community. Weeks later there were felony indictments. In this moment I realized that education and awareness were one of the few tools in parent and student hands to protect our children from sexual abuse. Our beloved faith and school community had a brush with a possible predator.

Nationally, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused before they turn 18. The Ohio Children's Trust Fund's most recent data on sexual abuse in Ohio indicates over 9,000 reports of sexual abuse were received in 2017. The CDC's ACE study (Adverse Childhood Experiences) provides a clear picture of the long term costs in health, well-being and opportunity for survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Ohio's children and my children deserve age appropriate and mandated instruction to prevent childhood sexual abuse. Ohio needs to protect children where they play, pray and learn.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 321 and I urge the committee to pass HB 321.