



**Proponent testimony submitted to the
Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
House Bill 321
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May 19, 2020**

Chair Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 321. The Center for Family Safety and Healing (TCFSH) fully addresses all aspects of family violence, including child abuse and neglect, teen dating abuse, domestic violence and elder abuse. We offer a continuum of research-based prevention, assessment, intervention and treatment programs for individuals who have experienced family violence.

Child sexual abuse has a profound effect on mental and physical health across the lifespan. Children who experience sexual abuse are at an increased risk of depression and anxiety. Adolescents with a history of child sexual abuse are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse and self-harm behaviors. Adult women who were sexually abused have poorer health outcomes, including high rates of obesity, more major illnesses and healthcare utilization, and lower educational attainment. In addition, victims of child sexual abuse are more likely to experience re-victimization as adults if there isn't appropriate intervention.

House Bill 321 ("Erin's Law") seeks to require age-appropriate sexual abuse education to children in grades K-6, and sexual violence prevention education 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. TCFSH supports Erin's Law because prevention education helps break cycles of abuse, empowers adults to advocate for youth and connects students and families with appropriate resources for healing.

In addition, I support House Bill 321 as a prevention educator who understands the important role that our schools play in providing equal access to education and skill building. As a child of parents in the social work/mental health fields, common topics of conversation in my home included personal safety, appropriate body boundaries and positive consent. When I began my professional journey by working in higher education in Ohio, I observed that this was not typical for many of my students. Numerous students in my program struggled with boundary setting, seeking validation through risky

sexual behaviors and low grade point averages and/or retention rates. Student after student disclosed a history of childhood sexual abuse and shared that college was their first opportunity to learn about dating and sexual violence. I became a passionate advocate for prevention education in K-12 schools, accessible for all students in every community throughout Ohio.

In my work as the Training Supervisor at TCFSH, I see the immense impact of early and comprehensive abuse prevention education in our elementary and teen programs. A second grade student said that she'd found her "I Mean Business!" voice and knew how to use it. A seventh grade student said providing a space "to name abuse" in her classroom made her feel like "a weight had been lifted" and she could begin to heal through counseling services at TCFSH. Teachers share that prevention education empowers adults to adequately address sexual abuse through common language and tools. A parent with a previously unaddressed history of sexual abuse said a program for parents helped "to provide a new path forward" for their family. However, I also see how a lack of mandated prevention education creates disparate access and health outcomes for students, parents and communities.

Every student deserves access to developmentally appropriate sexual abuse prevention curricula. The passage of Erin's Law ensures that students, school personnel and parents/guardians have techniques and resources to address sexual abuse in every community across Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. TCFSH strongly encourages passage of House Bill 321. I am available to answer your questions via email at Caitlin.Tully@familysafetyandhealing.org.

Caitlin Tully