

B. Kennedy Kent
District 25



Committees:

Community and Family Advancement
Criminal Justice
Government Accountability and Oversight
Health

Contact Information:
77 S. High Street, Columbus
Ohio 43215-6111
Office: 614-466-5343
Toll-Free: 1-800-282-0253
Fax: 614-719-3581
Email: Rep25@ohiohouse.gov
www.house.state.oh.us

State Representative

B. Kennedy Kent

Ohio House—District 25

Sponsor Testimony

House Bill 137

Good afternoon Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman Rezabek and fellow members of the Criminal Justice Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 137. This legislation seeks to mandate all county and municipal peace officers to report child abuse and neglect.

Currently, forty states specifically include law enforcement officers under their mandatory reporting laws. Nine other states, and Puerto Rico mandate *all* residents report child abuse and neglect. Ohio stands alone as the *only* state to not classify officers as mandated reporters.

Ohio has not always trailed in the nation when it comes to protecting children through mandatory reporting laws. In 1963, Ohio became one of the first states to enact a mandatory reporting law with the passage of House Bill 765 of the 105th General Assembly. The law originally only designated physicians, including hospital interns and resident physicians, as mandated reporters. Since then, many other professions have been added to the list. Included in Appendix A of this testimony is the full, extensive list of professionals classified as mandated reporters, to which I believe county and municipal peace officers should be added.

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Officers in Ohio have the opportunity to interact with children in any number of situations. There is an officer present in nearly every Ohio high school and library. In 2015 Ohio officers were called to homes, on domestic violence runs alone, 72,899 times. Many of those times, children were present.

I was moved to introduce House Bill 137, in part, because of my own experience advocating on behalf of a Columbus family with five very young children between the ages of 8 months and 8 years of age. Police were frequently called to the children's home in response to domestic violence incidents. However, although officers probably had reasonable cause to suspect the children may be suffering or facing a threat of suffering abuse and/or neglect, they did not contact child protective services. In Appendix B of this testimony, I have also included samples of police reports where officers were similarly called to domestic violence situations where children were being subjected to the disturbing and violent interactions of their caretakers, but where there was no indication a child protection agency was notified.

Currently, the law only requires county and municipal peace officers notify a child protective agency upon receipt of a child abuse report. However, making peace officers mandated reporters when they see or suspect abuse and neglect will enable officers to report these early warning signals to social service agencies, so the agencies can act before too much harm is inflicted.

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Every child has a right to a safe childhood and a life free from violence. Identifying and responding to these cases early and getting provisions in place is extremely important to the overall health and future of the child. Child abuse and neglect can affect a child's DNA, thus affecting generations to come.

House Bill 137 has minimal, if any, cost associated with ensuring that officers are trained to say something if they see something. It will not result in any loss of revenue to the state of Ohio. In return, with the passage of this bill, Ohio will add approximately another 35,000 people in our communities, who have an eye on our children and will be mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. I truly believe this bill will provide another layer of protection sorely needed in the wake of the statewide opiate crisis, Ohio's infant mortality rate, and child sex trafficking.

Thank you again for your time Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman Rezabek and fellow members of the Criminal Justice Committee. I will be happy to take any questions that you may have.

Appendix A

Appendix B