

Standing Committees

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Ohio's 73rd House District: Western Portion of Greene County

**House Finance Committee
House Bill 302 – Jacob's Law
Sponsor Testimony
09 December 2020**

Chair Oelslager, Chair Callender, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of House Bill 302, Jacob's Law, to include child-abuse related offenses into the violent offender registry that would specify the basic information on individuals who have been convicted of crimes against children. This bill was favorably reported out of the House Criminal Justice Committee with an 11-0 vote. I have been working on this legislation for much of my time as a State Legislator, and after many meetings with various stakeholders, I am confident this bill will make it to the Governor's Desk this General Assembly.

Many of you might have noticed this bracelet I have worn nearly every day for the past 5 years. It reads "Justice for Jacob – In loving memory of Jacob Alan Barker." Jacob left us far too soon. I stand before you today in the interest of telling you Jacob Barker's story, in the hopes that we can create a law that prevents any more of these heartbreaking stories from being written in Ohio's history. No

more children should have to suffer at the hands of child abusers, when there are clear steps we can take to prevent such tragedies.

In 2015, Jacob Barker was a vibrant two-year-old boy. His family was unaware that his birth mother had entered into a relationship with a convicted child abuser. This man had previously been convicted for endangering an 8-week-old baby after he fractured her skull and broke her ribs and ankle. He served a mere two and a half year sentence before being released and meeting Jacob's mother. Jacob's mother left her young son in the assailant's care, where Jacob was abused. Jacob died from blunt force trauma, with injuries to his head, neck, and torso.

Far too often, children face death at the hands of child abusers who have been entrusted to care for them. What makes Jacob's death especially tragic is that his murderer was not a first-time offender. The first offense was a huge red flag. Had a registry been created, it might have been easier for Jacob's family to be aware of the danger that was introduced into their family dynamic.

It should not take a second offense, and a second tragedy, to eliminate the threat of people like Jacob's murderer harming more children. This legislation would add **child abuse** and **domestic violence** charges of the Ohio Revised Code into the Violent Offender Database created through the 132nd General Assembly's

“Sierah’s Law”. Any family member may then go to their local county Sherriff’s office to run a check on a new person entering the family dynamics to see not only convictions for violent offenses, but specifically crimes committed against children. Jacob’s family and I believe that these additions to the database would help other families avoid the tragedy they suffered by giving them the opportunity to discover who may be in their child’s life and allow them to take proper precautions.

My office has spoken at length with both offices of Attorneys General DeWine and Yost, and the Department of Jobs and Family Services to arrive at the bill before you today. Through collaboration and increased technical accessibility, we are able to create this sub-database within Sierah’s Law for \$100,000 (down from pervious estimates of \$500,000), and maintain it for only \$15,000 per year (down from \$450,000 per year). In this legislation, it appropriates \$100,000 for FY 2020 and \$15,000 for FY 2021. However, given that FY 2020 is now over, I have drafted an amendment to this bill that would shift the appropriations to \$0 in FY 2020 and \$100,000 in FY 2021.

Only persons who have been **convicted** of these specified crimes against children will be included in this database. No other information from JFS or a law enforcement entity will be included to ensure only those with convictions against children will be identified to concerned persons requesting access.

Jacob's family has been instrumental in the creation of this bill and I would like to offer my sincerest gratitude to Tammy Barker (Jacob's Grandmother) and the rest of the family for bringing this legislative need to my attention. Their efforts to turn this unimaginable tragedy into a positive endeavor so that other families will never go through the pain and suffering they experienced should be recognized. Additionally, I would like to thank Representative Seitz and Butler for their help with this legislation as well as Chairman Lang's work to unanimously pass this bill out of the House Criminal Justice Committee.

Chair Oelslager, Chair Callender, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Jacob's Law, and stand ready to answer any of your questions.