Hello! My name is Siara Akers and I’m here to talk about the importance of Erin’s Law. How Erin’s law can change the course of many lives and how it could’ve changed the course of my own life.

In junior high my best friends dad made me feel uncomfortable in many ways. I remember feeling uncomfortable but I never said anything because I didn’t understand. I didn’t know if what I was feeling was valid or if I was over thinking, I was just a child. By high school the grooming turned to molestation. If someone would’ve told me the difference in uncomfortable touch and comfortable touch it wouldn’t have gotten that far. If someone would’ve been in my building to tell me the signs of “grooming” it wouldn’t have turned to sexual abuse. His daughter, my then best friend committed suicide this past year, 15 years later. She was misunderstood for the longest time and she never sought help for the abuse she said she experienced from him. If we would’ve been better educated I honestly believe she would still be alive and I wouldn’t be standing up here with this story.

I also know a little girl who asked her mom for gym notes every single week. She complained of leg pains for months that eventually her parents took her to the doctor. She pleaded the doctor for a gym note; he denied her request and sent her home with growing pains diagnoses. That little girl was 6 years old; she could not understand the uncomfortable feelings she had. She didn’t know how to tell an adult because she just wasn’t sure her feelings were valid. She was looking for an out. That little girl was my daughter. She was a little girl who had a mommy who talked to her about good touch and bad touch. I didn’t think about teaching her about her feelings around the touch. She can sit on her dads lap and feel comfortable but sit on someone else’s lap and feel uncomfortable, but why tell an adult because we allow her to sit on our laps. I can only imagine how confused she was.

Months later it came out that her first grade gym teacher had allegedly inappropriately touched 88 little girls in her class. 36 of those times were deemed felonies. These little girls WERE uncomfortable. If someone would’ve been in the building to talk about comfortable touch and uncomfortable touch one of these little girls would’ve said something and then the whole course of their lives, and their parents, would be completely different.

We teach our children fire drills, tornado drills, active shooter drills, but your child is more likely to be sexually abused than being in any of those. We teach our kids to look both ways before crossing the street, but your child is more likely to be molested than get hit by a car.

I know these statics are said so often but 90% of victims are abused by someone they know and trust. 60% are acquaintances like teachers, neighbors, or community leaders. 30% are immediate or extended family. Only 10% are strangers to the child. Only 31% of children tell someone within the first year of their abuse. I truly believe a lot of that is because they just don’t get it, they just don’t understand. We need to break this barrier of communication, it is a sad necessity in today’s world.

Many may not understand the “why” of this law, but those of us that do really know the importance of it.

I appreciate your time and pray that this law passes for our current children and the future children here in Ohio. Thank you.