



**Proponent testimony submitted to the
Primary and Secondary Education Committee
House Bill 321
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Chair Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 321. At Crime Victim Services, we believe communities thrive when all members prevail over trauma and support one another with empathy and respect. Since 1981, we've been leading the way in education, advocacy, and outreach to facilitate healing in West Central Ohio. We have served more than 53,380 victims and survivors through our 10 programs, including: court advocacy, domestic violence, rape crisis & sexual violence, anti-human trafficking, elder victim ministry, CASA, guardians, and most relevant to this testimony, youth violence prevention.

Over 42 million survivors of childhood sexual abuse live in the United States. Three million of those survivors are still children. One in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys experience sexual abuse before they turn 18, and just over one-third of those children disclose. Most survivors are abused by someone they know and trust. Perpetrators are able to facilitate abuse because our culture keeps so many of us in the dark about what symptoms sexual abuse produces in children.

As this committee knows, House Bill 321 ("Erin's Law") seeks to require age-appropriate sexual abuse education to children in grades K-6, and sexual violence instruction 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.

Day One of Crime Victim Services supports Erin's Law because it is the most logical and effective approach to ending sexual violence. Every aspect of our work, from prevention to advocacy, informs our decision to zealously advocate for Erin's Law in Ohio.

As a prevention educator in Ohio, I see first-hand the need for and impact of age appropriate violence prevention education in our schools. As outlined above, too many children are suffering at home. And without adequate instruction as to what constitutes a healthy and



appropriate relationship, they lack the understanding, the language, and the space to properly report what is happening to them. When we deliver our social emotional learning curriculums, designed specifically to teach middle school and high school students about the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, how to receive and ask for consent, and how to intervene when you see someone who needs help, our classrooms develop into safe spaces to navigate difficult conversations.

In the last year, I witnessed students support a friend breaking up with an abusive partner, gain experience asking for consent and finding healthy ways to deal with rejection, and walked countless students through the process of reporting sexual abuse that they had to that point kept quiet and hidden. All of this was possible because individual teachers invited me into their classrooms and made space for the conversation. I work very hard to build relationships with the teachers, administrators and counselors in each of the schools where I teach. They recognize the need for this instruction in their classrooms, but often feel ill-prepared and under-equipped to deliver it. This is something that House Bill 321 can help us to rectify.

I understand that opponents often argue that conversations about sexual abuse should take place at home. As a parent, I can appreciate the desire to want to keep sensitive conversations private. However, I believe this desire for privacy puts too many children at risk as many victims are sexually abused by the very people who would have to facilitate those conversations. Secondly, it fails to provide well-meaning parents with adequate supports and resources. Anxiety, confusion, and discomfort would lead many parents to avoid this topic altogether. I believe the State of Ohio has an obligation to act in good faith to protect children and relying on families to implement sexual violence prevention and education leaves children vulnerable to further abuse.

Further, developmentally appropriate sexual abuse curriculum and traditional academic achievement are not mutually exclusive – there is space and time for both in our schools. Developmentally appropriate instruction will help students identify abuse. It will help us get children the resources they need to recover, and will help prevent further harm. Erin’s Law will reduce sexual violence, and lay the foundation for long-term impact on survivors through early detection and intervention.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. Day One of Crime Victim Services strongly encourages passage of House Bill 321. I am available to answer your questions today or by email at erinb@crimevictimservices.org.