

**Proponent Testimony Submitted to the Ohio Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**HB 105: Erin's Law**  
**Sondra Miller, *President & CEO***  
**Cleveland Rape Crisis Center**  
**May 12, 2021**

Good Morning, Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee.

My name is Sondra Miller, and I'm the President and CEO of Cleveland Rape Crisis Center. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today to support Erin's Law, House Bill 105.

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center's mission is to support survivors of rape and sexual abuse, promote healing and prevention, and advocate for social change. In any given year, we provide services to more than 10,000 rape and sexual abuse survivors in Cuyahoga, Lake, Geauga, and Ashtabula counties and reach an additional 50,000 people via education, outreach and prevention programming.

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center has long been a leader in preventing sexual violence. I often tell people, my job as CEO is to put the organization out of business. At times, I receive a curious response to that statement ... until I explain that it is by working to fulfill our vision - the elimination of sexual violence.

I firmly believe Erin's Law will help us do just that.

Ensuring access to age-appropriate K-12 prevention programming in Ohio is a good thing.

Last year, Cleveland Rape Crisis Center provided advocacy, counseling and case management services to more than 1,500 sexually abused children. I'll give you a minute to let that sink in. In a year when people were sheltering in place; not leaving their homes for groceries or a haircut or a trip to the dentist...we welcomed more child survivors of rape and sexual abuse through our doors than ever before – a 25% increase over the prior year.

And we know, it's just the tip of the iceberg. The current climate is exacerbating the problem we already had. And the pace of referrals and requests keeps building.



The Halle Building  
1228 Euclid Avenue, Suite 200  
Cleveland, OH 44115

(216) 619-6194 Main  
(216) 619-6195 Fax  
clevelandrapecrisis.org

Approximately 90% of sexually abused kids know their abuser. Around 30% are hurt by someone they love. These facts discourage children from reporting. The abuser leverages this dynamic, which often increases the severity, frequency, and duration of the abuse.

For these reasons, and more, Cleveland Rape Crisis Center recently launched an Early Childhood prevention program, aimed at children 0-8. While much of this programming reinforces that it is up to ADULTS to keep our kids safe, it also provides age-appropriate tools and interventions which promote safety and foster a culture of reporting for children.

Additionally, we partner with a vast variety of area middle and high schools, as well as other youth-serving organizations to deliver primary prevention platforms. This programming is aimed at challenging social norms and changing behaviors. In an average year, our small but mighty team is in classrooms every single day of the school year.

But it's not enough.

The thirst for sexual abuse prevention programming is astounding, but not readily available. We must create on-ramps to information and programming within all our schools. We must equip even the youngest of children with the tools needed to prevent victimization.

For those for whom it's too late, we must offer a life-preserver of support via channels to report. By doing so, we will stop the abuse and curb the life-long trauma that is being created through their experiences.

I implore you. And your colleagues in the 134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to pass House Bill 105. Ohio needs to join the nation as the 38<sup>th</sup> state to mandate such programming be embedded in K-12 schools.

I appreciate you taking time to hear testimony on this important bill and am happy to answer any questions you may have.



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