



**Proponent testimony submitted to the  
Ohio Primary and Secondary Education Committee  
House Bill 105  
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 105. As Ohio's statewide coalition, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) advocates for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services and empowers communities to prevent sexual violence.

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 experiences sexual abuse before they turn 18, and just over one-third of those children disclose. Most survivors are abused by someone they know. 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 105 ("Erin's Law") would 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. We in part support HB 105 because it does not require a school's full-time teachers to lead the education – giving flexibility for partnerships with rape crisis centers and child advocacy centers who have already built robust prevention programming and have trained educators with extensive experience.

Every aspect of our work, from prevention to advocacy, to legal representation and community technical assistance and training, informs our decision to zealously advocate for Erin's Law in Ohio. We work with survivors of childhood sexual abuse and adolescent sexual violence in a variety of contexts. The survivors we have had the honor of engaging with have shown remarkable strength and resiliency – but many have told us that for years they had no way of knowing what or who to tell, or how to begin their healing journey. House Bill 105 is designed to eliminate that barrier for Ohio's children. Specifically, existing sexual violence prevention efforts by Ohio rape crisis centers have demonstrated consistent impact – increasing student knowledge and comfort disclosing abuse. Further, HB 105 requires training for teachers and staff to increase recognition and competence in responsive reporting. Ultimately, it is never a child's responsibility to prevent or stop abuse – instead,

we, as adults, have a duty to create a safe environment that models healthy interactions and boundaries, and provides a safe avenue for disclosure.

Many OAESV staff are current or former prevention educators. Many, including myself, are former public-school teachers. We know from experience that strategies to recognize and address trauma through developmentally appropriate instruction models is a critical foundation for a healthy and engaged classroom. We know that a child's classroom should be their safe space – and we know, as do the educators on this committee, that such a safe and calm space requires skill and patience. This is especially true when students endure the trauma of abuse. However, teachers know that when we craft learning goals and use curriculum that acknowledge social-emotional development, students are generally more successful across subject matter courses. One specific benefit to HB 105 is, as mentioned above, that it permits prevention educators from various government funded and regulated programs (including rape crisis centers) to assist in providing the mandated lessons. This is beneficial in that it removes the burden from teachers, and bolsters the connection to resources for those who share abuse.

Opponents argue that conversations about sexual abuse should take place at home. First, many victims are sexually abused by the very people who would have to facilitate those conversations. Second, anxiety, confusion, and discomfort would lead many parents to avoid this topic. Third, the State of Ohio cannot go into homes to make sure these conversations are taking place. Relying on families to implement sexual violence prevention and education leaves children vulnerable to further abuse.

Now more than ever, as child sexual abuse continues to escalate<sup>1</sup> during the pandemic, as online sexual exploitation of children is increasing faster<sup>2</sup> than we can begin to address, we have to create an educational environment that acknowledges how many students experienced trauma during the year they learned from home. We have to do this in a fashion that does not over burden teachers, and we have to do it in a manner that adds resources through connections with community-based programs designed to support survivors in healing.

The developmentally appropriate instruction required by House Bill 105 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.

Erin's Law must pass. Our children are at stake, and we have no other choice.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. OAESV strongly encourages passage of House Bill 105. I am available to answer your questions today or by email at [ccrary@oaesv.org](mailto:ccrary@oaesv.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Anya Kamenetz, Child Sexual Abuse Reports Are on the Rise Amid Lockdown Orders, NPR (April 28, 2020), *available at* <https://www.southcarolinapublicradio.org/2020-04-28/child-sexual-abuse-reports-are-on-the-rise-amid-lockdown-orders>.

<sup>2</sup> Claire Merchlinsky, Child Sexual Abuse Images and Online Exploitation Surges During Pandemic, NBC News (April 23, 2020), *available at* <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/child-sexual-abuse-images-online-exploitation-surge-during-pandemic-n1190506>.