

Dear Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson and Committee Members,

First I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today to testify in favor of passing House Bill No. 105.

My name is Jaclyn Scanlan and I am a Mental Health Therapist with Catalyst Counseling providing school-based therapy to high school students in Warren County, OH. I am here today to express the vital importance for passing Erin's Law and bringing this program into our Ohio schools.

I have been working as a mental health professional for 20 years. During this time, I have worked with youth in multiple settings such as Boys and Girls Clubs, Youth Correctional Facilities, Outpatient and Residential Mental Health, and now in our schools. I am stating this to help you understand that I am not only a member of our community that cares for our children's safety, but a well-seasoned professional that has worked with youth in a variety of placements, with a variety of ages, and with a variety of problems.

One treatment need that I have encountered in EVERY setting I have ever worked was that of helping victims of sexual abuse. You see, all children are vulnerable to be sexually abused. They aren't just the poor kids. They aren't just the kids getting in trouble. They aren't just the kids left unsupervised. It is ALL of our children that are at risk of being sexually abused, with 93% of the time it being by the hands of someone they know.

You may recall that back in 2019 at an elementary school in Warren County, 88 1st grade children, girls at the ages of 6 and 7 years old, were sexually abused by their gym teacher. Someone they trusted. A teacher. Someone they know. This teacher has since been sentenced to prison on 34 counts of Gross Sexual Imposition for 8 years.

But the trauma of sexual abuse doesn't just go away when the perpetrator goes to jail. It has lasting effects on a person that will carry well into their adulthood. I have worked with victims as young as 10 years old that have engaged in self-harm (i.e. cutting themselves), and have suicidal thoughts due to the guilt and shame that they carry with them about being sexually abused. They feel dirty. They feel alone. They feel as if they aren't worthy of basic human needs of love and safety because of what has happened to them. Sexual abuse victims are more likely to develop drug addictions, depression and PTSD, all of which can carry into their adult lives.

Representatives, do you know any 10 year old children? Can you imagine a child that you love and care for wanting to die because of the actions that someone else forced on them? Abuse that the child never asked for. Abuse that can be prevented.

We hear the statement "this is a parent's job to educate the children on sexual abuse". What about that child that is getting abused by their parents or guardian?

For the past year, many children have been home from school, due to the pandemic. For some of these children, this has meant being home for extended hours with potential abusers. We have yet to know the full impact that quarantine has had on our children and the incidences of abuse. But what we do know is any prolonged exposure within an abusive household, provides more opportunity for the abuse to occur.

Erin's Law can help prevent a child from being abused. This Law provides age-appropriate education that helps students identify and stop what is referred to as "grooming" behaviors. These are the actions that an offender engages in with the victim to create false trust so that the abuse can gradually intensify.

Erin's Law can help a youth that is currently being abused find their voice to not only identify it, but also to report it. It can empower our youth to protect themselves. You can help protect our children. You can literally save lives.

In about the time that I have been here addressing you, another child was sexually abused. In the amount of time it took me to write this address, three children were abused. Every 9 minutes, a child is sexually abused. So why would we not want to provide support to stop it?

I work with victims of sexual abuse on a daily basis. Daily. Most of which have not disclosed their abuse until later into their teenage years, but it started as young children. I would love to one day be out of a job because abusers no longer have a way to take advantage of our children. Because our children will have the tools to voice their needs to be kept safe, secure, and free from this life-altering trauma.

We teach our children to "stop, drop, and roll" for fire safety and prevention. Our students, from kindergarteners through high school seniors, engage in active shooter drills to keep themselves safe from school shootings by teaching them to "run, hide, or fight". Both very necessary drills for scary scenarios.

So I ask you then why would we not want to give them the tools to protect themselves from abuse that is statistically more likely to happen to them than either catching on fire or being shot?

This law makes sense. It's painful to admit that we need it. But as Representatives of the residents of Ohio, you not only have the obligation to be a voice for those that voted for you, but also for those too young to have a voice.

I thank you for your time and support of Erin's Law.
I wish you and your family health, safety, and the voice to advocate otherwise.

Thank you.

Jaclyn Scanlan, MSW LISW-S

*Statistics obtained from <https://www.rainn.org/>