

May 11, 2021

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

I am humbled and honored to have been asked to provide written testimony in support of passing Erin's Law in the state of Ohio.

I am a licensed independent social worker in the state of Ohio and have worked in the field of social work for more than 25 years. Early on in my career, I conducted child abuse investigations for Hamilton County Job and Family Services where I was trained as a Forensic Interviewer through the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Childhood Trust. Upon receiving this training, I spent many years interviewing children of all ages who made allegations of sexual abuse by a trusting adult. One of the most daunting parts of interviewing these children is that they often explained the details without even realizing they were being abused. They answered questions and provided consistent details of what a perpetrator did to their body very factually while holding crayons in their little hands and we colored together. While it was heartbreaking to listen to children provide intimate details of the sexual abuse they endured, it was extremely satisfying to sit on the witness stand and provide testimony that would lead to legal consequences for their perpetrators.

As I look back on my career during this time, I can say with confidence that I conducted more than 150 interviews and not one time was the child abused or raped by a stranger! The children that I reflect on as I write this testimony were always sexually abused by someone they knew and were taught could be trusted. As the listening ear who had the job of gathering information from these child victims to be used forensically, it takes a lot to contain your emotions while creating an environment that is a safe space for children to speak freely and not feel ashamed. Although it has been years since I practiced in this role, I remember clearly walking away from every interview thinking that this could have been prevented and this child's innocent life spared had they been educated and empowered with tools, language and safe people to confide in.

When you look at Erin's Law that has passed in many other states, it mandates that age-appropriate education take place in the school system so our children can be empowered by education and armed with tools to prevent them from becoming victims of sexual abuse. Erin's Law paves the way for our children to develop forward thinking and safety planning so they are able to identify when they are being groomed by a perpetrator and empowered to tell someone. I wonder how many children could have been spared the life-long damage and mental health problems had they been able to identify when a "friend" is really a sexual predator patiently waiting to go in for the kill. This happens too often and it is time for Ohio to take a stand and address this!

In conclusion, this is only a snippet of the stories and life-long problems that sexual abuse has on our children. I would be honored to talk with you more thoroughly to promote this much needed legislation should the opportunity arise.

Sincerely,



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