



**Proponent testimony submitted to the
Ohio Primary and Secondary Education Committee
House Bill 105
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Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence
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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.

As this committee is aware, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys experiences sexual abuse before they turn 18, but only one-third of those children disclose. This means that each member of this committee engages with numerous people every week, perhaps every day, that are survivors of child sexual abuse – without ever knowing it.

The last government data available reports that there were over 1.8 million students enrolled in Ohio's K-12 institutions. How do we help the over 360,000 Ohio K-12 students that are victims of sexual abuse if our schools continue to maintain our culture's long-standing reporting barriers? If we do not pass Erin's Law and engage with sexual violence prevention educators from Child Advocacy Centers and Rape Crisis Centers, we cannot.

Since OAESV's inception, we have worked to eradicate sexual violence with prevention education support from the CDC and other sources. We approach our work on this issue on the basis of these facts:

- Children are never to blame for sexual abuse and are not responsible for stopping or preventing it.
- It is the responsibility of every adult to prevent and stop sexual abuse.
- The vast majority of child survivors of sexual abuse are victimized by someone they know, not by a stranger.
- Children deserve to be believed when they disclose abuse, and they should have access to services that will support their healing and protect them from future harm.
- Many adults living in Ohio were sexually abused as children. They also deserve to be believed and to have access to supportive services.

- Adults who sexually victimize a child should be held criminally accountable to the fullest extent of the law, both to secure justice for the child who has been harmed, and to protect other children and society at large.

As this committee knows, House Bill 105 (“Erin’s Law”) aligns with OAESV’s above-listed facts, as it would require age-appropriate sexual abuse education to children in grades K-6, sexual violence instruction to grades 7-12, training for teachers on sexual abuse identification and prevention, and model curricula provided by the Ohio Department of Education. We believe that Erin’s Law properly places adults in a position of responsibility while simultaneously raising children’s awareness and improving their capacity to identify and disclose sexual abuse. Many community members have disclosed as adults to OAESV, and have supported and collaborated to pass this legislation.

In the past year, child sexual abuse has risen at alarming rates. Districts, schools, and teachers must be prepared to welcome children back to classrooms after unmitigated and sometimes accelerated instances of sexual abuse. Children will need support and resources. We know from our work with survivors that many adults say they wish someone would have known – that someone would have told – that someone would have made it stop. We must be prepared, as adults, to support child survivors in every way we can. We must pass Erin’s Law.

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 rbeltre@oaesv.org.