

Proponent Testimony for HB 105: Erin's Law
Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Andrew DeFratis, *Director of Public Affairs*
Cleveland Rape Crisis Center
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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 105, also known as Erin's Law, on behalf of Cleveland Rape Crisis Center.

My name is Andrew DeFratis, Director of Public Affairs with Cleveland Rape Crisis Center. One of the largest rape crisis centers in the country, our mission is to support all survivors of rape and sexual abuse, promote healing and prevention, and advocate for social change. Our vision is the elimination of sexual violence.

House Bill 105 would require Ohio schools provide annual age-appropriate instruction in child sexual abuse prevention for grades kindergarten through 6, and sexual violence prevention education for grades 7 through 12. It would also incorporate training in child sexual abuse prevention among teacher professional development topics, while ensuring curriculum transparency by allowing parents and legal guardians of students to request to examine the instruction material.

As Representative Lipps has previously testified, the National Center for Victims of Crime reports that 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys are victims of childhood sexual abuse.

More than 90% of sexually abused kids know their abuser. More than 30% are hurt by family members, 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.

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center believes it is never too early to educate children in what they should do if someone hurts them. In 2020, we provided advocacy, counseling, and case management services to more than 1,500 sexually abused children just in our Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake and Ashtabula county service area. This represented a 25% increase over the previous year.

In a year when Ohioans weren't leaving their homes to see family, when families were hesitant to go grocery shopping, see a doctor or get a haircut, we saw an increase in child survivors of rape and sexual abuse come to us for services.



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We knew even before the pandemic that our efforts only reach a portion of the children that need our services. We also know the pandemic has continued to exacerbate the issue, as the pace of referrals and requests for services keeps growing.

We have seen interest in sexual abuse prevention programming for all ages, and have launched an Early Childhood prevention program aimed at children ages 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.

I'll remind you: 1 in 5 girls, and 1 in 20 boys are victims of childhood sexual abuse. In every classroom that prevention education is not reaching, there are Ohio children that are not equipped to prevent or report sexual abuse, and seek support to deal with trauma that will be a part of the rest of their life.

The demand exists, the tools exist, and it is time Ohio's children be as prepared and equipped to prevent and report abuse as the students of the 37 other states where Erin's Law is in place.

I appreciate this opportunity and strongly encourage your support of Erin's Law. I would be happy to accept questions today or by email at andrewd@clevelandrcc.org.



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