

Thank you Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairman Blessing and Ranking Member Fedor for this opportunity to speak with your committee about the amended HB 105 - Erin's Law.

My name is Sally Dyer and I am from Dayton, Ohio.

It was in the spring of 2016 that I first learned about Erin's Law and that Ohio was considering it. I began then to advocate for it in Ohio, and now, 5 years later, I am still at it. I am passionate about this legislation. I have firsthand experience of just how utterly devastating childhood sexual abuse is to children, families and communities.

Amelia M. Auberger is a social worker who has worked in the field of child abuse for more than 25 years. As a trained forensic interviewer, she completed more than 150 interviews of childhood sexual abuse victims. She submitted written testimony in favor of HB 105 to the House in May. At that time, she stated, "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.*"

The Rape, Assault and Incest National Network (RAINN), reports that "every 73 seconds an American is sexually assaulted. And every 9 minutes, that victim is a child." Those are alarming statistics in and of themselves, but even more so, that "as many as 93 percent of victims under the age of 18, know the abuser." In fact, 59% were acquaintances and 34% were family members."¹

Sadly, this is the story of the family in which I was born. We represent three generations of victims or perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse. I was the victim of incest from a brother several years older than me. Those scars will never fully heal but years of therapy have helped me cope. My youngest sister was not as fortunate. She reported childhood sexual abuse to her therapist as an adult. She experienced numerous hospitalizations, addictive behaviors, psychotic breaks and ultimately her suicide at the age of 45. However, her trauma did not end with her death. The mental illness in the wake of her abuse profoundly affected her children and both reported abuse as well. My family alone represents more than a half dozen souls impacted by incest and sexual abuse. I'm confident thousands of other families in Ohio have similar stories.

Not only is there a huge emotional toll from childhood sexual abuse, but it also results in a costly drain on public resources as well. A large percentage of victims end up in juvenile detention

¹ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/perpetrators-sexual-violence>

centers, jails and prisons, addiction treatment programs, homeless shelters and community mental health programs.

Let me tell you now about a young man I first met when he was 10 years old and in a foster home. I will call him Tony. For 8 years I was his guardian ad litem (CASA). I continued to love and care for him into his adulthood after he aged out of foster care. Tony is a perfect illustration of the all too common expected outcomes for sexually abused children who don't receive the treatment they need and deserve early on. Family members molested him at a young age. Tony then became a prime target for grooming by a pedophile. During his time as a ward of the state, Tony's behavior resulted in repeated stays in juvenile detention centers in between foster placements. Then as a young adult, his drug use and acting out resulted in many stints in county jails. His drug use escalated as he aged - from marijuana, to OxyContin and then heroin all to mask the pain from his sexual abuse.

At the age of 34, Tony finally obtained placement in a county residential drug treatment program to address both his addiction to heroin as well as his PTSD and mental health issues resulting from his history of abuse. Tony told me about how much he feared actually talking about his history of sexual abuse and exploitation and its impact on his life. A few days after my last visit with him at the treatment center, Tony walked away from the program. Soon after, the Dayton police found him dead behind a carwash in Dayton with a needle in his arm. Tragically, Tony could not be saved despite many people who genuinely loved and cared for him and despite all of the tax dollars spent to house him in foster homes, detention centers, jails and finally a treatment program. Along with my sister, Tony paid the ultimate price resulting from childhood sexual abuse suffered at the hands of people they knew and trusted.

I was 25 years old, my sister was 42 years old, my niece and nephew were in their late teens and early 20s respectively, before we disclosed our histories of incest and sexual abuse. Tony was in his mid-20's when he mustered the courage to begin telling his story. Today, I appear to ask your support for a Bill providing a pathway for keeping our children safe and breaking the cycle of trauma at the earliest age possible before it is too late to help. er, Robert paid the ultimate price resulting from childhood sexual abuse suffered at the hands of people they knew and trusted.

Returning to Ms. Auberger's testimony - she wrote, "*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.*"

These words are so powerful and critical to consideration of the bill before you now. Erin's law will help empower our children to ask for help from the right people using the right language when they are not safe.

I beg you - in my sister's and Tony's memory, for my niece and nephew and for the thousands of other innocent children who have suffered childhood sexual abuse - empower our youngest and most vulnerable Ohioans with the age appropriate education and the words they need to obtain help from safe and caring adults before it is too late.