



Home of the Battered Women's Shelter and Rape Crisis Center
with services in Summit and Medina Counties

Proponent testimony submitted to the Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee

House Bill 105

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*Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Primary
and Secondary Education Committee:*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 105, also known as Erin's Law. As the CEO of the Hope & Healing Survivor Resource Center, which is home to the Battered Women's Shelter and Rape Crisis Center serving Summit & Medina Counties, we want to communicate our strong support for House Bill 105.

The Rape Crisis Center responds to hospital crisis calls requesting advocacy for children who are screened for sexual abuse through the CARE (Child Abuse Risk Evaluation) Center at Akron Children's Hospital. We are extremely concerned by the dramatic increase in calls related to child sexual abuse our internal data tracking shows. When comparing 2019 to 2021, the calls increased by 400%. We have no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated conditions that lead to sexual abuse and violence, especially amongst children as noted by the dramatic increase. National data also shows an increase in calls to the national hotline from people under 18 reported by RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network) during this same period.

Sexual abuse prevention education for children is a necessary step in addressing this crisis, as it will give children tools to keep themselves safe as well as educating children on when to ask for help if they are experiencing abuse. So often, abusers are a known person in the child's life, a family member or caregiver, making it difficult for the child to know how to respond. Not only can this horrific crime be prevented through educating the child, but the most serious impacts can also be mitigated if the child has information on how to seek help if they are experiencing abuse. I have personally worked with countless number of children who were abused by someone within their home. To continue to believe that every child receives the same level of education at home regarding sexual violence only serves to protect those causing harm and not children. As a survivor of child sexual abuse, this vital information would have provided me the education to speak up early in my abuse. It could have mitigated the five-plus years of trauma I experienced at the hands of a family member.

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Agencies like Hope & Healing are available to provide free services to survivors of sexual abuse as young as five (5) years old. Research shows that when they can receive specialized, survivor-centered trauma therapy and support services, there is an increase in protective factors, including increased sense of social support and belonging, increased goal-oriented behavior, adequate behavioral healthcare, and trauma resolution that enables the individual to improve daily functioning, breaking the cycle of violence and increasing meaningful involvement in the community – which overall contributes to the betterment of the community as a whole and a reduction in the cycle of community violence (CDC, 2021).

Without access to trauma therapy and support services, victims of sexual abuse risk long-term consequences that could include: an increased risk of sexual abuse and assault later in life, an increase of recidivism in the court; loss of education or income amongst survivors, an increase in the length of time of recovery, or an increase in overall violence if these issues escalate within families and our communities. Increasing our ability to educate children on their rights and safety will enable them to reduce the chances of victimization and the effects of trauma, as well as breaking the intergenerational cycle of abuse.

For these reasons, Battered Women's Shelter & Rape Crisis Center of Summit & Medina Counties strongly encourages the passage of House Bill 105.

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