

Written Proponent Testimony

HB 105

Michelle Carpenter, B.S., C.A., R.A.S.S.

Chief Executive Officer, Haven of Hope

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

My name is Michelle Carpenter and I am the Chief Executive Officer at the Haven of Hope. The Haven of Hope is a nonprofit victim advocacy center in Cambridge, OH. We provide direct trauma informed services to all victims of crime in Guernsey and Noble Counties. I have been employed with the agency since 1996 and continue to provide direct services to victims of crime and their families.

I am writing to support “Erin’s Law”, or House Bill 105. I have had the honor of providing trauma informed services to more than 20,000 crime victims in my 25 years as a Victim Advocate. I have had the privilege of meeting extraordinary people who have had the most unimaginable things happen to them. In my experience, being sexually assaulted is one of the most heinous things that can happen to someone. I have provided outreach education to middle school and high school students at Rolling Hills School District for over 22 years as part of a dating violence/date rape curriculum in their health classes. I am here to tell you many of the children we work with are not prepared with basic safety information until we meet them their 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. We are able to give information to children that meets their developmental level and experience. I am here to tell you that it works, it helps and it is necessary to stop sexual abuse before it happens or at the very least right after it has started.

Many victims do not report right away for a long list of reasons that fit their situation. Some of those reasons are they don’t think they will be believed, they don’t know that sexual abuse is wrong or illegal, they don’t know who to tell that they are being abused and they believe that they have caused it somehow. We

can teach children about safe relationships at all levels, respect for others, expressing feelings and communicating needs for help.

Unfortunately, we know that there are too many ways for children to be victimized, particularly with the internet and social media providing new ways for dangerous people to gain access to and exploit children. We must be able to give children and school staff information and ways to increase online safety while using these forms of communication. Sometimes the only safe place a child has is in school. We can reach them while they are there and work with the schools to address this important issue.

Children are resilient and I have met so many brave children and adults who have been sexually abused. They have stated that if they had known sooner that it was wrong, that the threats to kill them or their loved ones could be stopped, that love should not hurt, and that they would have been believed they would have told sooner. We owe it to our youth to arm them with this information so they can live free of violence and become who they want to be without having trauma decide for them.

For these reasons and in my experience I am asking you to pass Erin's Law in Ohio so that we may make a difference in our future by taking care of our most vulnerable population. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you have by email at [michelle@havenofhope.org](mailto:michelle@havenofhope.org)

Michelle Carpenter, B.S., C.A., R.A.S.S.

Chief Executive Officer