

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 Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for again considering testimony on House Bill 105, also known as Erin's Law. I appreciate this opportunity to voice our strong support.

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.

I cannot stress enough how important services like 24-hour crisis hotlines, individual counseling, and criminal justice system advocacy are to survivors of rape and sexual abuse. In any given year, we provide services to more than 10,000 survivors in Cuyahoga, Lake, Geauga, and Ashtabula counties.

But the elimination of sexual violence requires a prevention component. That is why, each year, we also work to reach an additional 50,000 people via education, outreach and prevention programming, including our popular school-based prevention programs.

As you know, Erin's Law (HB 105) would play a huge role in providing Ohio's youth age and developmentally appropriate prevention-focused instruction, while also ensuring teachers and other professionals are equipped to recognize and respond to the signs of abuse in children.

We have seen continuous demand from schools for prevention education programming. Our education team reinforces that it's up to adults to keep kids safe, while providing tools and fostering a culture of reporting when something doesn't feel right.

We utilize the Monique Burr Foundation Child Safety Matters evidence-based curriculum (K-5), whose concepts cover shared responsibility for safety, safe adults, the concept of red flags, refusal skills, health and unhealthy choices, bullying, cyber bullying.

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.

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 all the other states where Erin's Law is in place.

I appreciate this opportunity and strongly encourage your support. I would be happy to accept questions by email at andrewd@clevelandrcc.org.



Clark-Fulton Office
2937 West 25th Street, 2nd Floor
Cleveland, OH 44113

(216) 619-6194 Main
(216) 619-6192 24/7 Hotline
clevelandrapecrisis.org