

My name is Gerard Ahrens. I presently live, and have always lived in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1961, at the age of 11, I was groomed and then sexually abused by Jesuit Father Robert Erpenbeck in Milford, Ohio. In the 63 years since my abuse, I have written dozens of letters and articles on this subject in various publications, I have served as a Volunteer Victim Advocate for survivors of this crime, and I have come to know hundreds of such victims, almost all of them permanently damaged far worse than I was. I am an old man now, but the effects of child sexual abuse on my life have been and continue to be profound, including but not limited to, inability to really trust anything or anyone, deep seated problems with intimacy and close personal relationships, terror of doctors and even routine medical procedures, and 35 years of psychotherapy. In addition, for me the worst of all, though I realize it may not necessarily be pertinent to this hearing, I have suffered severe damage to my faith in God.

On the Friday after Thanksgiving, I visited in the hospital another victim of my abuser, Fr. Erpenbeck, who was a serial groomer and offender, as admitted by his Religious Order. This victim that I visited is dying, as we all must someday, but he is dying in the misery of PTSD flashbacks because, not to be overly graphic, but the bodily invasive treatments and operations he is suffering through are literally a physical reenactment of his abuse experience. I do not mention this for effect or to curry sympathy, in fact for the exact opposite reason because you see, ladies and gentlemen, his life is essentially over, which is basically true for all victims of child sexual abuse. There really is no healing for this, no going back to make it right, no just compensation, which is why what we are about here today is the most important thing, the ONLY thing that really matters: PREVENTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE FROM HAPPENING IN THE FIRST PLACE.

And the best way to do that is by stopping it in the grooming stage. which virtually always precedes overt acts of child sexual abuse. The key provisions of HB 322 clearly delineate the major stages of the grooming process in easily definable and recognizable terms: " entice, coerce, solicit, and prepare " and, most importantly, all is subject to the Reasonable Person Standard, a long-standing cornerstone of American Jurisprudence that assures, by definition, a reasonable determination of the accuracy and applicability of those terms in a given fact situation, to be determined by law enforcement, prosecutors, and courts of law.

A generation of child sexual abuse victims - my generation of victims, ladies and gentlemen - is dying off, and so it must be. For some, tragically, the trauma has been so severe that death will be a relief. But, sadly, there are and always will be new younger generations of potential child sexual abuse victims, and you, ladies and gentlemen, have in your power, by passing this anti-grooming legislation, HB322, an opportunity to lead Ohio a long way along the road toward protecting children of this state from having ruined lives of distrust, lack of faith in anything, and horrifying PTSD flashbacks until the day they die. DO IT, ladies and gentlemen. Do it FOR OHIO'S CHILDREN OF TODAY AND TOMORROW.