



Jon Husted
Lt. Governor of Ohio

TO: House Criminal Justice Committee
FROM: Lt. Governor Jon Husted
DATE: Tuesday, June 11, 2024
RE: House Bill 531 – Proponent testimony

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Criminal Justice Committee,

House Bill 531, or “Braden’s Law,” is a straightforward proposal that aims to protect our children online, while also honoring the memory of Braden Markus and the many others who we have lost across Ohio from sextortion.

Early last year, I began my mission to help protect our kids online by championing the Social Media Parental Notification Act. Since then, we have collaborated with the legislature on numerous other bills that aim to safeguard our children online, including Senate Bill 212 which requires age verification for pornographic material, House Bill 295, the Innocence Act, and House Bill 250 which was recently signed into law by Governor Mike DeWine, which requires cell phone policies in K-12 schools. I believe the other proponents of these legislative proposals, joined by the voices of parents whose children have been targeted, is showing that we will stand up for our kids and that we can protect the children of this state.

I have met the Markus family who is still grieving the loss of their son Braden as well as Tim and Tamia Woods from Streetsboro whose son, James, died by suicide in a situation that mirrors Braden’s. It was also recently shared through a Dispatch article that an Ohio State student was sextorted by a man in Chicago he met via a dating app. These are just three of many examples that show that sextortion is happening to Ohioans, and it is ruining lives. According to the FBI, 19 minors are targeted each day in sextortion schemes, leading to suicides in multiple states. Here in Ohio, we don’t let tragedy happen without fighting back.

Braden’s Law creates a number of requirements that I believe will help our children and their families. The law will criminalize the threat of releasing, exhibiting, or distributing private images of another and provide immunity to victims of sexual extortion for sending private images.

It will also require expedited digital access when a minor dies. This is extremely important for families like Braden’s, who were forced to experience 10 months of confusion, and not knowing why, before they received access to his phone records.

This is a very large issue in the lives of our children. They are being targeted online and social media companies enable it with their algorithms. They allow our children to be targeted by adult



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sexual predators, and we must fight back. When Ohio takes action on an issue and passes legislation, the rest of the nation pays attention.

I commend the Markus family for speaking up. In addition to passing a law, it's also important we talk to our children, and that we tell them that if they make a mistake or do something that might embarrass them, they need to talk to mom, dad or a trusted adult in their lives. We are here to protect them, and Braden's Law will protect children in this state.

I am wholeheartedly in support of House Bill 531 so we can take another step to protect our children from the dangers online.