

Faith Colson
Public Comments on HB 147
Primary and Secondary Education Committee
October 17, 2023

Chair Bird and Members of the Committee,

My name is Faith Colson, and I am representing myself as I share testimony in support of HB 147. I have the unfortunate lived experience of having been groomed, abused, and assaulted by my teacher, although in another state: Illinois. It was after advocating for changes there, and two laws passing under the umbrella of [Faith's Law](#), that I was approached by an advocate from Ohio. She saw similar problems in her state that I had been fighting to address in Illinois. Then last fall, I was interviewed by a local Cincinnati reporter to share my experience on this national problem facing students.

Despite Ohio's well-written sexual battery law, a lot of sexual harm perpetrated by teachers does not result in criminal charges. The perpetrator is smart enough to not initiate sexual contact in front of another mandated reporter, and by the time they initiate sexual contact, they have so groomed the victim that the victim will oftentimes not report them. I remember when my abuser told me he was afraid of going to jail. I knew his life was in my hands, and it took me 4 years to leave him. It took me 13 more years to report it, and that was only because I feared that he could abuse again. Even then, it was very hard to get a criminal conviction, and most survivors never get that sliver of justice.

Without criminal charges, the only potential paper trail to warn other schools is tied to licensure and employment history. A common practice across this country is what's referred to as passing the trash or district-hopping, when a teacher is fired or resigns under a cloud of suspicion and then hides any misconduct from a prospective employer. This means they can re-offend in the new, unsuspecting district, and the cycle can continue, increasing the number of student victims. Ohio already has a good working definition of conduct unbecoming, but the loophole is in how to make sure someone who has committed such cannot hide that history and then get rehired elsewhere.

This bill seeks to prevent a teacher who has committed conduct unbecoming from retiring and then getting rehired in another district. That new district would be unknowingly exposing children to someone who has already transgressed in a way that should be reported to the state, but because of current statute, is not reported—unless this law passes. Another loophole addressed by this bill is reporting conduct unbecoming if it results in a substitute being removed from the local eligibility list. Again, this may be the only way to prevent that educator from re-offending a new district, as it generally takes child victims years to report abuse. In order to stop misconduct perpetrated against students, adults must actively set up safeguards because children cannot protect themselves.

Every child has the right to attend school without fear of sexual exploitation. School is not optional but mandatory, so the government has a role in ensuring the safety of students there. Some think that educator sexual abuse would never happen in their school, in their community, to their child, but it happens everywhere, in every demographic. Most teachers would never sexually prey upon a child, but the ones who do leave a path of destruction, which is why we must actively put up safeguards to protect innocent children from this potential harm. Leaving the status quo means accepting that children are in danger and assisting would-be perpetrators in finding further school employment where they can re-offend and harm more children.

HB 147 would make schools safer by preventing the re-offense against children in new districts. Sexual harm has no place in a school, but we must take action to prevent it. Please support HB 147.