

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 322.

I am Rebecca Surendorff, the co-founder of Ohioans for Child Protection. We are a grassroots effort of parents and grandparents in Ohio which advocate for prevention of child sex abuse and access to justice for victims. I first came to the Ohio Statehouse 5 years ago, in the aftermath of a high-profile child rape case in Rep Seitz's district. We had a variety of concerns, but foremost was our belief that sexual grooming of a child for abuse should be criminalized. Grooming includes in person acts and communications that desensitize the child to sexual content, unwanted sexual contact, and manipulates a child to comply/ commit sexual acts or take sexualized pictures. At its core grooming is a psychological abuse of the child which is for the purpose of preparing the child for sexual exploitation and preventing disclosure of the crimes.

In my December 2023 House Civil Justice Committee testimony, I shared in more detail how I came to advocate on child sex abuse at our statehouse. In the interest of time today I will briefly recap. Fr Geoff Drew began his career as a music minister at my elementary school where he was abusing little boys. He went on to become a priest despite documented concerns and his last assignment gave him superintendent like power at St. Ignatius, the largest catholic elementary school in Ohio. My 4 kids were all students there, at the time of Geoff Drew's arrest. Court documents in Fr. Drew's 2019 arrest and 2021 conviction created a frightening picture of red flag sexual grooming behavior with minors over the course of 3 decades in 3 Ohio counties. Drew had many child protective service reports and was criminally investigated in Butler County in 2013, 2015 and 2018.

Starting 20 years ago catholic church volunteers began to receive training to spot sexual grooming behavior. This training lead parents, teachers and staff to report to authorities about Fr Drew. Ohio dated laws left law enforcement powerless. We cannot rely on a patch work of private institution policies with inconsistent enforcement to protect kids from sexual assault.

The trauma and PTSD associated with childhood sex abuse is enormous and causes delays in disclosure. The average age to disclose abuse is age 52 and fixated offenders will average 150 victims in their lifetime. The CDC estimates 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 20 boys will be sexually abused by age 18. The Status of Girls Report this year found over 21% of girls in our state have experienced sexual assault in the last 12 months.

Our current laws depend on an offender importuning, with documentation, or a child victim reporting their assault long before the science tells us they will disclose.

In 2021 a distraught father from Dayton reached out to Ohioans for Child Protection co-founder Teresa Dinwiddie-Herrman and brought her these binders. These pages contain thousands of messages between pastor Cutcher and a boy in his parish school. The messages begin innocently enough and then they take a dark turn. The priest starts to discuss sex acts with the child on multiple occasions. Any reasonable person can tell this was not sex ed, this was an adult manipulating a child for a purpose. These documents are from law enforcement. It appears the parents reported this alarming behavior to the police and our laws fell short again. For 3 years I have carried these binders into meetings with lawmakers to show them this example of grooming behavior. My own encounters with child predators are within the Catholic Church since that was

the environment my family spent the most time. What everyone must realize is that predators will try to access kids within any youth serving organization from schools, churches, athletics, scouts and more. Child sexual exploitation impacts all our communities in Ohio whether rich or poor, urban, suburban or rural. This bill passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support. The passage of HB 322 will protect children in Ohio for generations to come. We must do more to stop the cycle of sexual violence in our state.

Thank you to the committee.

CDC statistics

<https://www.cdc.gov/child-abuse-neglect/about/about-child-sexual-abuse.html>

Status of Girls Report

[Status of Girls \(communitysolutions.com\)](https://www.communitysolutions.com/status-of-girls)

Cincinnati Local Media and investigative reports

[Who knew about ex-priest Geoff Drew long before his arrest for child rape? \(wcpo.com\)](https://www.wcpo.com/news/local/who-knew-about-ex-priest-geoff-drew-long-before-his-arrest-for-child-rape/)

[Interview with an accused priest: Missing report, burnt hard drive, texts w/ boy \(wcpo.com\)](https://www.wcpo.com/news/local/interview-with-an-accused-priest-missing-report-burnt-hard-drive-texts-w-boy/)

[Ohio House passes child sex abuse reforms prompted by Father Drew rape case \(fox19.com\)](https://www.fox19.com/news/local/ohio-house-passes-child-sex-abuse-reforms-prompted-by-father-drew-rape-case/)