



enough secrets.
enough shame.
enough hurt.
enough confusion.
enough denial.

enough child sexual abuse.

Testimony of Jetta Bernier, Executive Director of Enough Abuse

to the

Judiciary Committee

in support of House Bill 322

June 14, 2024

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on **House Bill 322** which would specifically define “grooming” as a process of behavior that often serves as a precursor to child sexual abuse and which would criminalize it. This is crucial because some adults in positions of power or authority, such employees in schools and youth-serving organizations, can take these positions in order to get close access to children and youth, give them special attention and build up trusting relationships with them, their parents and colleagues. They can then abuse their power, violate our trust and manipulate children into engaging in sexual behaviors which children and youth cannot developmentally consent to with an adult.

While schools and youth organizations may have policies allowing them to fire a teacher, coach counselor or other employee who engages in a sexual relationship with a student, abuse can be hard to prove and prosecute, allowing those who abuse to work in other settings where they can abuse more children with impunity. Criminalizing grooming behaviors enables these cases to be prosecuted before they rise to the level of sexual assault, and allows our justice system to impose upon them a criminal record. This can significantly reduce their chances of working in the future in settings in our communities where children learn and play and where they deserve to be protected.

HB322 would be a step forward for the State of Ohio and a model for other states, making it the sixth state in the U.S. to proactively address the practice of “grooming”. We urge you to pass without reservation this important step in making our children safer.

Executive Director, Enough Abuse