

Chairman Senator Manning, Vice-Chair Senator Reynolds, and Ranking Member Senator Hicks-Hudson,

My name is Julie Edsall. I am a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor of 26 years, a mother of two adult children, and a victim of childhood grooming. I thank you for the opportunity to be heard regarding HB 322. I am speaking from both a professional and personal experience regarding grooming and sexual assault.

Ohio needs to criminalize sexual grooming behaviors as they are part of a pattern that often leads to child sexual exploitation and assault. HB 322 will allow law enforcement to aide targeted children and hold offenders accountable for their predatory actions.

In my working with clients over the years who have been groomed and harmed, they all experience an array of symptoms: challenges and difficulties in navigating their lives, PTSD, nightmares, difficulty in relationships, struggles with true intimacy, hypervigilance, feelings of shame, fear, and anger, self doubt, and a lack of confidence to name just a few. They are also at a higher risk for substance abuse, anxiety, depression, suicide attempts, and other mental health issues. They often delay disclosing their abuse due to the twisted normalizing of behaviors throughout the grooming process.

Speaking from experience, the journey of going through the judicial system is also difficult and horrifying in itself. Victims are frequently re-victimized in the process and many times the offenders go free to move onto their next victims. Predators leave a trail behind of traumatized individuals who will deal with the grooming, the molestation, the abuse or rape for the remainder of their lives. Please keep in mind the impact on their families and close friends who stand by them feeling powerless and helpless. Their lives become altered as well.

In my particular case, I was a seven-year-old girl who was groomed by a Franciscan Friar(Ray Chappa) who was my religious education teacher. He would constantly try to touch me, make me sit near him, wrote notes to me, and would watch me. The friars would pray in a secluded area that overlooked the chapel during mass. He would tell me later what I was wearing and how beautiful I looked. He attempted to get me off by myself. On one occasion he came to my home when I had missed a few religion classes, and so decided that the next week that he would pick me up at my babysitters without my parents consent. When he showed up, he had a priest with him and he made me sit in the front seat between the two of them as we drove down the street to class. On another day, he let the class outside to run off energy. The kids all ran one way around the house and I ran the other. He followed me, tackled me on the side of the house and straddled me while tickling me. I was a seven year old girl.

I was fortunate to be removed from him before there was any further progression in grooming. Others were not so lucky and he is now on the credibly accused list with The Archdiocese of Cincinnati (<https://catholicaoc.org/restoring-trust/lists>). I learned recently that the same friar went

on to become a priest. He had access to many young girls, and he took the opportunity to groom, assault and rape, others in the years following. If there had been a law in place, he could've been identified, stopped and charged. The victims could have been spared the trauma they endured and the pain they continue to live in their lives today.

House bill 322 will empower law enforcement to look at the pattern of the predator's behavior which frequently includes material evidence of grooming. The rate of children abused in Ohio is unacceptable. This must stop! These life altering traumatic experiences can be prevented. Research has improved our understanding of child sex abuse. We understand predatory grooming is a part of the modus operandi of child sex offenders. We understand that victims may be ready to disclose grooming; however, may not be ready to discuss their rape in court. Offenders can be held accountable. This bill will not end abuse in Ohio, but it will be a vital tool to protect innocent children from some of the most unspeakable crimes. Please allow the law-enforcement and victims a path to justice, protect children and prevent these tragic crimes for future victims.

Thank you again for your time and consideration in supporting this very essential House Bill 322. We have the opportunity to protect children for generations to come.

Sincerely and humbly,

Julie A. Edsall MS, LPCC-S, LLC