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

As a Catholic mother, please imagine the concern, when my priest was removed from our parish for what church leaders said was "texting a boy". When our local assistant prosecutor in Hamilton County stood and spoke to our congregation, he repeated the statement "the texts were completely innocuous". This statement sent chills down my spine, as just a few years prior to this, a 12 year old boy in my family had been texting back and forth with his 6th grade teacher.

His mother felt uncomfortable about the texting, but also didn't want to ruffle any feathers, as this teacher just seemed to be such a likable and "fun" teacher. The texts seemed "innocuous" in the beginning. This teacher seemed to be close with mostly the boys in his class. After a few months of communication between this boy and his teacher, his mother read a particular text that was sexual in nature. Her instinct led her to believe there was malicious intent and she presented her concerns to the school principal. He had received a similar complaint from another parent and the teacher had been reprimanded for texting directly with boys before. Therefore, they, the administration, made the decision to investigate further.

The teacher's school issued laptop was examined by school officials and revealed it had been used to access pornographic websites and contained images of what appeared to be underage males without their shirts. It was discovered some of the boys pictured had previously attended this school. Law enforcement was then able to investigate and court records show that they found a pattern of behavior of where this teacher was communicating with several current and former students via text messages and Facebook messenger. What would have happened if the mother reported to police first? What would have happened if the predatory teacher used his personal computer instead of the school issued device?

This teacher would build the trust of these children and their parents. He exhibited many red flag grooming behaviors. He had taken some of these children out of town, given them alcohol and taken photos of their naked bodies and in some of the photos, you see the hand of the perpetrator on the child pictured. He had photos of the boys in various places as if they were on a vacation and some photos showed the boys depicting inappropriate sexual acts with food, etc. In his apartment, they found cameras and discs with over 600 images and videos containing child sexual abuse material. He had used peer-to-peer file sharing software to share images with others as well. Some of these images and videos were of children in various sex acts. Some of the children were prepubescent and were being penetrated by adult males.

It was noted that while this teacher was removed for the investigation from the school, he sought employment at establishments that would give him access to children including amusement parks

and video stores. He had already worked at Kings Island and was known to encourage children to spread the word to come see him while he was working. Luckily, this predator has served a sentence in federal prison. Luckily, a brave mother knew something was wrong and said something. Luckily, this school administrator took the very important next step by examining the school issued laptop. Luckily, this allowed investigators to charge him with federal crimes and who knows how many children have been saved from harm.

We cannot rely on luck alone to protect kids from predators.

Law enforcement officers need HB 322 to use in these situations where we aren't so lucky. Because of technology, our children are more accessible to predators than ever before. In the Father McWilliams case in northern Ohio, a teen boy was being exploited right in the child's own home with parents present. In an investigation in Dayton, we see a priest that had a ten-month communication pattern with a 14-year-old boy, in which at times included reference to sexual acts. Because of technology, we are better able to document patterns of behavior or communication used to sexually exploit a child. Fixated offenders average 150 victims in their lifetime. If we give this tool to law enforcement officers, they could have the ability to potentially save so many children from harm.

We know other countries and other states have similar laws that make this illegal. Let's give our law enforcement officers the tools they need to better protect the children in Ohio. We believe all Ohio children should be safe where they pray, play and learn.

Thank you.