



Senate Judiciary  
Committee

Witness Form

Today's Date 12-03-2024

Name: Karen R. Sterwerf

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Organization Representing: \_\_\_\_\_

Testifying on Bill Number: HB 322

Testimony:     Verbal     Written     Both

Testifying As:     Proponent     Opponent     Interested Party

Are you a Registered Lobbyist?     Yes     No

Special Requests: \_\_\_\_\_

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Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judicial Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 322.

My name is Karen R. Sterwerf, and I am the mother of an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse. I have the perfect son who has a major hole in his heart from the abuse he suffered from his uncle. Shame on me for not recognizing the red flags that were right in front of my face. The abuser paid special attention to my son from the age of 3. Cool things like go-karts, race cars, air shows, motorcycles, visits to the airport, and even rides in an airplane the molester owned were part of the grooming process. I should have seen the red flags, but I didn't. I didn't think such things could happen or would ever happen to my child. You don't know what you don't know. I thought by being a stay-at-home mom, I could protect my kids from everything negative in the world, but boy, was I wrong. I didn't see the signs. I didn't see any of it and was there for my kids 24/7. The grooming process is something you need to be educated about to know what to look for.

The abuser was finally caught by confessing on tape with the help of a local detective. The monster pled guilty, the records were sealed, and the complete story was hidden for anyone to research true details. Even after he pled guilty, spent only 182 days in jail, and a small amount of time on the Sex Offender List, he convinced people that my husband and I paid off the judge, saying the whole thing was a mistake and never happened. He also threatened the lives of our family to add to the stress of the situation. He cleaned up his online presence, and then, the monster made his way to becoming the President of the Hamilton County Farm Bureau, which has close ties and access to children with the Hamilton County 4H program. I saw a big problem with a Sex Offender judging kids' livestock, being part of educational events, and participating in the overnights at the fair. I spoke unexpectedly in front of the Hamilton County Commissioners and suggested they do background checks before giving 4H more funding. They asked some questions and eventually made the abuser step down from his position. That was the day I felt I may have saved some kids from further torture. He was so smooth in convincing the adult members of these organizations that he was a great guy. As you can see, if adults bought his story, children didn't stand a chance to buy into his lies and manipulation.

House Bill 322 should become law here in Ohio because our children need all the help they can get to protect them from the evils of predators. You cannot realize the horror these kids and families continue to endure unless you have lived it. Please make House Bill 322 a law to save more children in Ohio. Give the predators a reason to deter them from abusing our children.