Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 393
Chris Graham

Senate Judiciary Committee
136th General Assembly

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee: My name is Chris Graham. I'm a survivor of child sexual abuse & child trafficking by priests. That experience, and the work of confronting it, is what led me to this building. I have worked alongside many of you, across the aisle and in both chambers, to advance reforms that protect children and expand justice for survivors.

I am here today in that same spirit.

I stand in support Senate Bill 393, and I feel I might me able to offer a unique insight to the committee on why this bill is important, but I also would like to propose some simple ideas that I think would serve to make Ohio's kids safer.

Child Sexual Abuse Material: Sentencing and the Quantity Standard

Every image represents an abuse event. Every video is a crime scene. Ohio's current sentencing structure treats a person possessing one image and a person possessing ten thousand images as functionally the same offender. That is wrong.

The escalating sentencing structure in this bill—the age-based enhancements for victims, the quantity specification that triggers a mandatory consecutive five-year prison term for one hundred or more images—these are proportionate and long overdue. I applaud the sponsors for this work.

I also want to acknowledge the expansion of the law to cover sixteen and seventeen-year-old victims when the offender is four or more years older. This matters deeply. It is an issue in Ohio law I have long been appalled by.

This bill raises the floor and gives prosecutors, families, and law enforcement a tool that has been missing.

The Other Side of the Camera

I want to share something as a child survivor from the other side of the camera.
When you are being abused in a room, the door is closed, and you know that it will eventually end.

You will eventually leave that room. You hope nobody saw anything. You hope that nobody knows and that you can move on with your life.

As a child, at least at my age, I comprehended that the abuse would eventually be over, and the terror of someone seeing what happened to me will pass. Shame is the weapon these men use, and a camera weaponizes that shame in an entirely different way.

A child comprehends that the video could be shared with anyone on the planet. That realization is terrifying. For me, there were few events at my church that were more frightening than walking into a room and seeing a camera set up. That fear kept me silent for decades. It kept my friends silent. It is one of the methods abusers use to ensure children never speak.

This is why the quantity standard matters. This is why equating one video to seventy-five images matters—it reflects the federal standard and acknowledges that video is not just another form of evidence.

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It is a multiplied trauma.

Artificial Intelligence: A New Weapon Against Children

This brings us to the AI provisions in this bill. Artificial intelligence presents a new frontier in weaponizing shame against children. This committee and this statehouse have already confronted this issue—you know the story of Brayden's Law, legislation born from tragedy.

AI-generated material can now create fake videos that appear to depict real children in compromising positions. These are not photographs of actual abuse events. They are fabrications. But for the child whose likeness is stolen, the trauma is real. The shame is real. The fear of exposure is real.

The way a camera can be wielded as a weapon against a child in the moment of abuse, AI can now be weaponized in perpetuity. This bill's inclusion of artificially generated depictions of minors—treating them with the same seriousness as images of actual abuse—is exactly right. Because what matters is not whether the abuse happened in front of a lens or was conjured by an algorithm.

What matters is the child.

What matters is understanding that this assault is inflicted not just through the creation of material, but through the knowledge that such material exists and can be shared, traded, and weaponized forever.

The Clergy Exemption

I want to raise one additional issue for the committee's consideration.
Currently, Ohio law contains a clergy exemption that allows members of the clergy to possess child sexual abuse material under a claim of bona fide religious purpose. This exemption appears in four sections of the code that this bill touches: ORC 959.21, 2907.321, 2907.322, and 2907.323.

Unlike physicians, attorneys, or licensed counselors, clergy in Ohio are not licensed by any state body. They cannot be disciplined by a state board. There is no defined standard for what constitutes a "bona fide religious purpose" anywhere in the Ohio Revised Code. The exemption in its current form creates an affirmative defense that is structurally unverifiable.

I submit that there is no bona fide religious purpose for the possession of child sexual abuse material. The only appropriate action for any person—clergy or otherwise—who discovers such material is immediate reporting to law enforcement.

A Reporting Gap and a Simple Fix

Currently, Ohio does not require individuals who discover CSAM to report it. Possession is a crime, but discovery and silence are not. This bill is an opportunity to close it.

I would ask the committee to consider a simple amendment: black-line the phrase "member of the clergy," from all four sections where it appears in this bill. That is the exact language in the exemption list in ORC 959.21(F), 2907.321(B)(1), 2907.322(B)(1), and 2907.323(A)(1)(a).

Replace the ambiguous exemption with a clear mandate: any person who discovers child sexual abuse material must report it to law enforcement immediately. Failure to report is a misdemeanor of the fourth degree.

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This would not criminalize accidental discovery. It would clarify that silence in the face of evidence of child abuse is not an option—not for clergy, not for anyone.

To Chairman Manning and the sponsors: thank you for this bill. It builds a better Ohio. If there are any questions or if I can be of further assistance to the committee on this issue, I am available.

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