

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, my name is Erin Merryn. I am a mother of three from Chicago. I am the founder of Erin's Law which requires personal body safety education be taught in public schools. For 11 years, I have traveled America testifying on Erin's Law and urging its passage. I testified in Columbus back in 2015 on the background and importance of this bill. It is time to do what is right for Ohio's children. Please don't let another year go by where children are not taught this curriculum that arms them with the knowledge to protect themselves. Ohio children are waiting to be given a voice on how to speak up.

As a child, I was taught about tornado and fire safety, stranger danger and the dangers of drugs in the D.A.R.E. program. However, I was not educated on personal body safety. I knew the 8 ways to say NO to drugs, but did not know a single way to get away from an abuser or how to talk to a trusted adult about it. That education never came. The only education I got was from the men sexually abusing and raping me. From ages 6-8 an adult neighbor sexually abused and raped me. He threatened me not to tell anyone, that he would come get me if I told anyone what he did to me. I stayed silent as a result of his threats. My parents moved when I was 8 and that brought me much closer to the next abuser in my life. At age 11, I woke up to a relative sexually abusing me. He lived down the street and the abuse continued regularly for a year and a half. He repeatedly told me this is our secret and nobody would believe me. He said I would destroy our family if anyone knew, so I kept my secrets of abuse written down in my pink childhood diary. It wasn't until the age of 13 that I finally broke my silence when my 11 year old sister came to me with the same secret. This relative was sexually abusing her too. I spent 6 years of my childhood being sexually abused. No child should have to suffer like that. My experiences led me to make it my mission to pass Erin's Law in all 50 states, to give kids the voice I never had, and to save them years of abuse.

I want to give you one example of my efforts to pass Erin's Law across America. I spent 8 years trying to pass Erin's Law in New York. The bill was passed every year in the Senate but killed by the Chair of the Education Committee in the Assembly every year. I kept coming back every year not giving up to pass it. I told these New York legislators, "One day I will bring you the proof of why I never gave up fighting to pass this in your state." I would soon show them how this law gave children a voice and ended their abuse.

In 2019 Erin's Law finally passed in New York! Last school year, Erin's Law was required for the first time in New York. While Erin's Law was being taught in March at an elementary school, 11 students came forward during the Erin's Law presentation disclosing they had been sexually abused. All of the children were accusing the same man of sexually abusing them: the PRINCIPAL! The principal has been sitting in prison since March and the number of children who have disclosed he locked them in his office and molested them is now at 26. Children are coming forward as far back as 2009 who are now in their late teens. These children say he did this for years while he would call them down to have lunch with them. This man groomed and then sexually abused all these boys for years. He has been the principal of the same elementary school since 2004. All it took was the very first lesson on Erin's Law to get children to disclose

and put this principal where he belongs in jail. The superintendent even spoke to the media and said in an interview that Erin's Law is what led to these kids disclosing.

There are abusers just like this in Ohio that need to be stopped. Please don't let Erin's Law die for the 6th year in Ohio. What happened in New York is proof that the law is needed. Help me pass Erin's Law and protect children across the State. Let's make Ohio the 38th state to pass it!

Erin Merryn
Founder Erin's Law.