



Judiciary Committee Testimony on HB 327

September 19, 2017

State Rep. Kent Smith, 8th District

Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony in support of HB 327. As was explained by Rep. Schaffer, the principal of these changes will increase the penalty for Importuning so that a minimum 6 month jail term is required if a defendant is found guilty of Importuning.

My personal interest in this legislation stems from my prior work as a member of the Ohio Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force or the Ohio ICAC for short.

The United States Department of Justice fights child pornography and online child exploitation through a task force strategy. There are 61 ICAC Task Forces across the United States. These Task Forces are funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention through the U.S. Department of Justice.

In Ohio that Task Force is led by the Cuyahoga County Prosecutors Office which is where I worked between 2004 – 2012. I had four assignments during my seven plus years at the Prosecutor's Office, one of which was with the Ohio ICAC Task Force.

The Ohio ICAC has 357 law enforcement partners across Ohio and it is the largest Task Force in the nation. The Ohio ICAC and its affiliate partners do a variety of things including: conduct investigations; go under cover on social media; track down collectors, distributors and manufacturers of child pornography; it conducts sting operations to catch would be child predators and follows up on Cyber Tips submitted to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Since 2003, the Ohio ICAC has arrested more than 1,294 travelers and made over 2,300 arrests.

The Ohio ICAC also provides training and technical assistance to its affiliate partners across Ohio and, when necessary, the Ohio ICAC will assist the other 60 ICAC Task Forces should the investigation call for multi-state cooperation. It does all these things to keep Ohio children safe from Internet child predators like Christopher Schroeder of Missouri and Ryan Johnson of California.

To illustrate the problem that this legislation seeks to correct let me briefly share the details of the Schroeder and Johnson investigations.

You may remember, in late 2015, hearing news reports of a missing 15-year-old Ohio girl who was found in Missouri after having been taken out of state by a 41-year-old male who had befriended her on-line. The 15-year-old victim was thankfully rescued by authorities on December 1, 2015. On November 8th, she had been picked up, by Christopher Schroeder, near her Brooklyn, Ohio home, and he drove her to his house in Missouri. He destroyed her cell phone so she could not contact anyone. Schroeder sexually assaulted the teen and videotaped some of those assaults.

Ohio ICAC investigators were able to trace the teen's interactions with Schroeder prior to her disappearance. They tracked Schroeder down and notified Missouri law enforcement who arrested Schroeder and rescued our 15-year-old Ohio victim. Christopher Schroeder was sentenced to 15 years in prison for his assaults.

A more recent Ohio ICAC arrest was made less than a month ago, on August 30th, when a 33-year-old male, Ryan Johnson, from California, was arrested in Newburgh Hts., Ohio.

Mr. Johnson had responded to a Craigslist ad on August 15th and started chatting with who he thought was a 13-year-old girl.

The chats became sexually explicit. Mr. Johnson asked the girl to send him nude pictures of herself and talked about taking the girl to a hotel.

While traveling for business, on August 29th, Mr. Johnson arranged to meet the girl the following day. When he arrived at the designated meet location, a public park in Newburgh Hts., he was arrested by Ohio ICAC investigators and local police.

When he was arrested, Mr. Johnson was in possession of a keycard to a room at an Akron hotel, three condoms, a bottle of sexual lubricant and two cell phones.

Mr. Johnson has been indicted on three counts: 1. Attempted sexual conduct with a minor; 2. Possession of criminal tools and 3. Importuning.

In researching this legislation, I examined Ohio ICAC cases from Cuyahoga County from 2012 to 2014 and found no fewer than 10 cases where the defendant pled guilty to Importuning and was sentenced to probation.

Bruce Barley (2012)

Ranjithkumar Bramanpalli (2012)

Suresh Nanda (2102)

Ronald Leon Collins (2013)

Wesley Baily Jr (2013)

Robert Andrews (2013)

Tommy Chung (2014)

Kevin Smith (2014)

Daniel Miller (2014)

Pedro Cosme (2014)

The difference between Christopher Schroeder and Ryan Johnson and the above 10 individuals is, in the case of Johnson the listed 10, Ohio children were lucky enough that law enforcement chatted with these defendants first.

But, I believe, the greater danger is that these ten convicted felons were not sentenced to jail and therefore all 10 could be on-line today or after school tomorrow or anytime that Ohio children might be on the Internet. That is the threat that HB 327 addresses. HB 327 would send these child predators to jail and help protect our kids.

I would like to thank Rep. Schaffer for his commitment to protect Ohio children from these on-line child predators. I would ask this committee to support this legislation. I am happy to answer any questions to committee might have.

LINK TO ARTICLE ABOUT THE SCHROEDER CASE:

http://www.cleveland.com/brooklyn/index.ssf/2015/12/missouri_man_held_f_ound_brookl.html

LINK TO ARTICLE ABOUT THE JOHNSON CASE:

http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2017/09/california_pilot_in_ohio_on_bu_1.html

Ohio ICAC on line: www.ohioicac.org