 Living Hope for Today Oct. 22, 2019

 **Written Testimony for Hearing on Erin’s Law HB 321**

Thank you for the opportunity to give my written testimony as a proponent of Erin’s Law, HB 321.

My name is Cindy L. Smith, I reside in Cincinnati Ohio and have three children and five grandchildren. I taught child abuse prevention in the public schools from 1993 till 1998. I am also the Founder of Living Hope Transitional Homes and was the director there for 11 years.

I am the author of *Whispered Truth*, a novel based on true events of abuse, forgiveness and hope. My newest book *Isabella’s Treasure*, *Empowering Children with Body Safety*, is an engaging story that teaches children how to recognize abuse and what to do if it happens. It is a powerful child abuse prevention tool for educators, parents and caregivers of children ages 2 to 6.

In 1960 when I was 5 days old, I was given up for adoption with my twin sister to alcoholic parents. From about the age of five to eight I was molested on a regular basis by my dad and his business partner - with my dad in the room sometimes molesting my sister.

Child Abuse occurs across all socio-economic, religious, cultural, racial and ethnic groups. If you had met my dad, you would have liked him – He could talk to anyone about anything. I had a hard time figuring out why I did not like him till I dealt with my abuse. He was an alcoholic - **40%** of confirmed child abuse cases involved drugs and alcohol use.

I married an abusive man at age 20 who molested my daughter at age 3. I spent two years in court trying to protect her - by her fifth birthday he had unsupervised visits again. **90%** of children are abused by someone they know; parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbors, teachers, coaches, family friends and babysitters. My daughter was also molested by a cousin on her father’s side, **95 %** of child abuse victims are at risk for suffering repeated abuse.

My oldest daughter who was molested became addicted to drugs for 17 years. Nearly **2/3rd** of all adults entering rehab reported being victims of child abuse. I believe that number is much higher because people are doing drugs to escape the abusive memories and usually won’t admit or deal with the abuse until they have gone through rehab.

If I had not lived this – it would be a hard story to believe. Being abused as a child changed the very core of who I was, I am a different person today than I was at 20. I spend years in counseling and prayer to find healing. From just hearing about my daughter’s childhood and mine you can understand why preventing child abuse is hard to do, but we can start by listening to children. Teaching child abuse prevention in the schools gives children the opportunity to share what is happening to them.

I believe the problem is getting worse because of child pornography. [Last year, investigators found over **45 million videos and images of child pornography** on the Internet — over twice what had been reported in the previous year.](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/09/28/us/child-sex-abuse.html?searchResultPosition=1) Research demonstrates that the brains of habitual porn users show great similarity to the brains of alcoholics. The reward system of the brain—the pleasure pathways is the same part of the brain that “lights up” when an alcoholic sees a picture of a drink.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, described a system at “a breaking point,” with reports of abusive images “exceeding the capabilities of independent clearinghouses and law enforcement to take action.”

In a particularly disturbing trend, online groups are devoting themselves to sharing images of infants and toddlers and more extreme forms of abuse. As a society, we are grooming children to be sexually abused, and we are grooming teenagers and adults to be sexual abusers.

I couldn’t walk into the counselor’s office at Springdale Elementary in 1966 and even start to explain what was happening to me, there were no words back then. I wanted someone to help me but there was no help…

But there is help today for children who are being abused and tools we can teach our children to keep them safe.

**Erin’s Law**, has already been passed in 37 states, but not in Ohio. The federal version of HB 321 passed in 2015 making it a federally funded mandate. Therefore, there are no excuses not to pass this law.

I believe this has been debated for the last 5 years in hearings – it is time to pass this law and protect Ohio children!

 I appreciate your time and consideration,

 Cindy L. Smith

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**What to Say to Child/Adult who has been Abused:**

 

The statistics above were reported from; Bureau of Justice Statistics, Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Help, *Sexual Assault of Young Children As Reported to Law Enforcement,* by Howard Snyder, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services