

Written Proponent Testimony for House Bill 105
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Lynn Layton
President and CEO, Monique Burr Foundation

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Chairwoman Manning, Vice Chairman Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 105, otherwise referred to as Erin's Law. My name is Lynn Layton, and I am the President and CEO of the Monique Burr Foundation for Children. Since 1997, the Monique Burr Foundation has provided evidence-based prevention education programs to schools and other organizations to prevent bullying, child abuse, exploitation, and all types of victimization. Our non-profit currently operates in 28 states, including 13 schools and organizations in the great State of Ohio. To date, we have trained over five million students nationwide, and we are so thankful to learn that the Committee is considering passing Erin's Law.

For over two decades, child sexual assault survivor and activist Erin Merryn has been fighting to pass her namesake law in every state across the country. Since 2009, the law has been enacted in 37 states, and I hope that Ohio will soon become the 38th. The Monique Burr Foundation has worked closely with Ms. Merryn, and we are fundamental champions of her work and what Erin's Law does. Her act is paramount for the safety and wellbeing of all children.

I am here to report that I know unequivocally that Erin's Law works, and I only ask the Committee to look at recent events at the Hilton School District in New York to see proof of concept. In April of this year, an elementary school principal at Northwood Elementary School was arrested on several child abuse-related charges. While these charges are heartbreaking, there is a silver lining – these horrible acts only came to light because a brave student who recently received MBF prevention education lessons to meet the requirements of New York's Erin's Law came forward and reported the principal. As the Monique Burr Foundation teaches in our program, this student wanted to be an upstander, not a bystander. While I wish no student ever needed to use our training to protect themselves, I am so thankful they have access to it because it works.

The impact of child abuse is profound, and without training most children do not report if they have been sexually abused or they wait years after the trauma to report. According to the Child Molestation Research and Prevention Institute, 95% of sexual abuse is preventable through education. Educating children about sexual abuse and grooming behaviors can lead to increased confidence in refusing behaviors that may lead to victimization and increase the likelihood of reporting to a trusted authority figure. By their very nature, schools are in a unique position to help young people shape positive, healthy attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that work to prevent sexual abuse. Here at the Monique Burr Foundation, our primary mission is to give these students the tools they need to protect themselves and speak up, and passing Erin's Law is the first step.

Child sexual abuse occurs in all populations. It happens to children in all socioeconomic and educational levels, across all racial and cultural groups, and in rural and urban areas. To be blunt, no community is immune. Approximately one in ten children will be sexually abused before they turn 18. Of that data set, about one in seven victims are girls. The average age of victims' first assault is nine years, and 93% know their attacker. The belief that these attacks are perpetrated by strangers is far from the truth. These are not strangers who groom these children or their parents, and yes, parents are victims of grooming, too. These



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children know their attacker, and what is worse, these acts are carried out by individuals the child and parents trust. I understand how heartbreaking this statistic is to hear. None of us want to think the adults we willingly expose our children to are the biggest threat to their safety. However, the solution to ease this worry is providing the proactive training Erin's Law recommends.

For the Monique Burr Foundation, we work with schools and organizations such as Beavercreek City School District, Kings Junior High School in Dayton, and Michael's House Child Advocacy Center in Fairburn to provide training that Erin's Law requires. Our evidence-based and evidence-informed, comprehensive prevention programs educate and empower children and teens with universal strategies and safety rules to prevent, recognize, and respond appropriately to the four types of child abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect), bullying, cyberbullying, digital dangers, exploitation, and human trafficking.

Passing Erin's Law is of the utmost importance, and again we are so thankful that the Committee is considering the act today. However, I feel it is important to highlight one more factor that must be considered when passing Erin's Law. It is imperative that the State also provide proper funding to support the implementation of effective prevention programs and to look at it as an investment in students' wellbeing and the associated economic impact. The average lifetime costs of a victim of child abuse are \$210,0127, which in turn has caused a lifetime financial burden in the United States estimated at \$9.3 billion in 2015 alone. The costs include healthcare, criminal justice costs, child welfare costs, special education costs, and productivity losses. It is essential for the success of Erin's Law that the State also provide funding so effective programs can be implemented. When sexually abused children are not treated, the community must deal with resulting problems such as mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, suicide, and perpetuating a cycle of sexual abuse.

In closing, child sexual abuse is preventable. Erin's Law is a common-sense proactive step that will save lives. We can dramatically lower the incidence rates, and we can start today by passing and funding Erin's Law in Ohio. The Committee has the power to give students and parents the tools they need to be safe and operate in a world where wolves are lurking. The protection of children is a nonpartisan issue and their safety and wellbeing affects us all. I urge wholeheartedly that the Primary and Secondary Education Committee pass HB 105.

Thank you.