

Dear legislators,

My name is Erin Merryn. I am a 30 year old from Chicago author of 3 books, named Glamour Magazine Woman of the Year for 2012 and People magazine named me last June one of fifteen women changing the world along with Oprah and Malah. I have done many national TV interviews including Oprah, Good Morning America, CNN, FOX, MSNBC, Katie Couric, among others. I am the name behind Erin's Law. A law that is passed in 20 states.

Erin's Law requires personal body safety curriculum talk to children Pre-K through 12th grade. Giving kids the ability to know the difference between safe and unsafe touches and safe and unsafe secrets it teaches children personal body safety. It requires training for school staff on the warning signs to look for in a child being abused, how to respond if a child discloses abuse to you, etc. Without Erin's Law kids only get the message from an abuser and that is to stay silent. Often children are abused for years and don't come forward until they are adults because they were educated only to stay silent and afraid it was their fault. There are currently 753,000 registered sex offenders in America.

Erin's Law is NOT a sex ed bill. This has nothing to do with teaching kids about STDS, abstinence, birth control, pregnancy, etc. This is completely different. This teaches kids the difference between safe and unsafe secrets, safe and unsafe touches, how to speak up and tell on the silent epidemic we as a society fail to address

I am on a personal crusade to get Erin's Law passed in all fifty states. As a child I was taught yearly in school on tornado drills, bus drills, fire drills, stranger danger, DARE, Bully intervention, internet safety, look both ways when you cross the street....I could go on and on. I knew not to go look for the lost puppy, I knew how to run out of the burning building, and I graduated from DARE knowing the 8 ways of how to say NO to drugs. But where were the 8 ways on how to get away and tell today? They never came in my childhood so when I woke up as a 6 year old at an overnight at my best friend's house to her uncle molesting me I didn't know how to tell. When he continued to molest me and eventually rape me at 7 years old as I kept it a secret. This man threatened me that he would come get me if I told anyone. From ages 6 to 8 ½ I continued to be molested and raped by him.

My saving grace came at 8 ½ when I learned we were moving only to find out I was getting that much closer to my next perpetrator this time a family member. From 11-13 years old my older teenage cousin molested me. He threatened me every time that this was our secret, no one would believe me, and I would destroy our family if I told. The only message I was getting as a child was from the men hurting me and that came from threats to silence me. Had I been taught to speak up and not keep this a secret, on what a safe touch and unsafe touch is, a safe secret and an unsafe secret I feel I would have spoken up from the start instead of being abused for years as a child. It is the lesson we fail to teach our children across this world and I have made it my mission for every child to be empowered with the voice I never had as a kid.

There is already plenty of researched based curriculum across America teaching this through role plays, discussions, activity books, and children's books on this. We encourage the parents to continue the conversation at home. This isn't a sex education bill. It won't teach kids about sex ed but instead personal body safety to speak up and tell and not keep it a secret if they are being sexually abused.

Erin's Law comes with little to no cost only a few hours out of the school year to teach it. With school social workers and psychologists already going into classrooms doing bully intervention, social emotional group activities with kids, this is just one more thing they can go classroom to classroom to teach. There are also many prevention educators that go into schools free and teach it from children's advocacy centers in every state to YWCA's and many other organizations.

We put so much emphasis on stranger danger with kids when 93% of the time children are abused by someone they know and trust. Only 7% of the time it is that stranger we worry so much about. There are 42 million survivors of sexual abuse living in America right now. 3 million of those are children. That could fill 46 national football stadiums. Get that image in your head for a moment. These children are sitting in

our classrooms everyday living in silence as their innocence is being killed and the psychological impact this is having on them as they live in this horror.

This law is common sense. I'm asking for an hour out of the school year to give children the voice I never had. Without that voice we are allowing the Jerry Sandusky's of our world to silence our children and kill their innocence. It is time we start fighting the war going on in our own backyards by empowering children with their voice and putting sex offenders out of business. I am on a mission to get this passed in all 50 states.

Do right by the children. Give that 7 year old child that is being sexually abused tonight the voice to tell someone tomorrow instead of continuing to be sexually abused and raped for years and waiting until she is in drug rehab at 30 years old finally coming to terms with what happened to her through years of her childhood. Give children the voice I never had as a child. Help make your state the next to pass it. As an aunt of two little girls being raised in Portland, Oregon I hope you will help me give them and all the other children in Oregon the ability to speak up and tell.

Thank you,
Erin Merryn
Activist, Author, Survivor