

My name is Erin Merryn and I am from Chicago. Three years ago I traveled to Kansas to testify before lawmakers. I am the founder of Erin's Law. This law requires personal body safety to be taught in public schools to children once a year. I have successfully traveled to 16 state capitals testifying on Erin's law before lawmakers since 2010. To date, 28 states now have Erin's Law.

As a child I was taught yearly in school tornado drills, bus drills, fire drills, stranger danger, DARE, bully intervention, Internet safety, to 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 eight ways of how to say NO to drugs. But where were the eight 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 during an overnight stay 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, I kept it a secret. This man threatened that he would come get me if I told anyone. From ages 6 to 8 1/2, I continued to be molested and raped by him.

My saving grace came at age 8 1/2, 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-years-old to 13-years-old, my older teenage cousin molested me. He threatened me every time that this was our secret, that no one would believe me, and that 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, or 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. I broke my silence after my sister came to me and told me our cousin was sexually abusing her too. Had someone come in and taught us in school not to keep this a secret, it could have saved us years of abuse.

Often children are abused for years and don't come forward until they are adults because they were educated only to stay silent and are afraid it was their fault. There are currently 753,000 registered sex offenders in America.

In December 2015, President Obama signed the "Every Student Succeeds Act" and in that bill there is federal funding provided for every state to be used for Erin's Law. So it is no longer an unfunded mandate.

We put so much emphasis on stranger danger with kids when 93 percent of the time children are abused by someone they know and trust. Only 7 percent 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 League stadiums. Get that image in your head for a moment. These children are sitting in our classrooms every day, living in silence as their innocence is being killed. They continue to deal with the psychological impact that 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 to put sex offenders out of business. I am on a mission to get this passed in all 50 states and will not stop until I do.

Do right by the children. Give that 7-year-old child that is being sexually abused tonight the voice to tell someone tomorrow. End the cycle of being sexually abused and raped for years and waiting until she is in drug rehab at 30-years-old to finally come to terms with what happened to her through the years of her childhood. Give children the voice I never had as a child. Help me pass Erin's Law for the children of Kansas Make it the 29th state.

In my home state of Illinois, a man was just sentenced to 40 years in prison for raping a little girl for three years. The day she learned about Erin's Law, she reported it to her teacher immediately.

Please help me save children going to bed tonight with the same secret I had.

Thank You,  
Erin Merryn

## Talking Points

1 in 4 girls. 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused by 18 these kids are sitting in our classrooms often being disruptive due to abuse.

Erin's Law is NOT sex ed. We are not teaching kids about birth control, STDs, etc. This is teaching kids Personal Body Safety. Protecting them from sexual abuse.

Erin's Law is not an unfunded mandate. Because of the 'Every Student Succeeds Act' passed in Dec. 2015 federal funds become avail. starting in the 2017-2018 year.

While parents should be having this conversation so many don't. We can't leave it up to the parents to talk to kids about this because majority only discuss "don't talk to strangers" Next place children spend most their time is in school.

We are asking for an hour out of a school year. It isn't taking away a lot of time from the school year. An hour can be the difference between a child telling today or suffering through many more years of abuse.

There is plenty of researched based curriculum avail. We are not asking schools to create their own curriculum.

Parents are notified and have the option to opt out their kids.