

Erin's Law Task Force - Executive Summary
(May 2012)

1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be the victim of child sexual abuse (CSA) by their 18th birthday. There are more than 42 million survivors of CSA in the United States. 3 million of these survivors are still children. These children could fill 46 national football stadiums. CSA is commonly referred to as the "silent epidemic". Most Illinoisans do not know this is a major issue in our State and our country.

93 percent of the time these children are abused by a person who is supposed to protect them; a person in a position of trust or authority. In almost every case, the only witnesses to this crime are the perpetrator and the victim. Perpetrators often tell the child this is a secret and no one will believe them. Children rarely report abuse immediately. Often, they feel the abuse was their fault. In these cases, delayed disclosure is the norm. Most victims never tell anyone until several years after the abuse, if they ever tell at all.

Last year, Children's Advocacy Centers in Illinois served 9,850 victims of child sexual and serious physical abuse. A National Institute of Justice study reported CSA costs our country \$35 billion a year. While that number is staggering, it pales in comparison to the human casualties. Children who experience CSA have a multitude of adverse outcomes. They include: poor academic performance, dropping out of high school, self mutilation, persistent post traumatic stress disorder, drug and alcohol abuse, a "markedly" increased risk for abuse in subsequent relationships, difficulty in forming meaningful and trusting relationships, cognitive deficits, depression, dissociative symptoms, and suicide. Early identification of victims and strong maternal support can significantly reduce the likelihood of the aforementioned human costs.

On February, 14, 2011, Governor Pat Quinn signed Public Act 96-1524. The Act created the "Erin's Law Task Force". 19 members were carefully selected based on highly specialized experience in the field of child sexual abuse and academia. School administrators, teachers, counselors, researchers, academic curriculum experts, child protective services, children's advocacy centers, and law enforcement met for more than 9 months. They carefully examined a balance of research and real life experience, and have made recommendations to educate children, school staff, and families on CSA. It is the belief of this task force that age appropriate school-based curriculum in Illinois public schools, pre-K to 5th Grade, will increase early reporting of CSA and in many cases prevent CSA.

The Erin's Law Task Force Recommends:

- Child sexual abuse prevention education should be taught in grades pre-K through 5. "Best Practices" should be included in this instruction (See page 16 of the task force report).
- Training for school administrators should be amended to include child sexual abuse as a selective strand under the Illinois Administrator Academy.
- Child sexual abuse training should be provided as a certified professional development unit (CPDU) for certified non-administrative school personnel.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chief Danny D. Langloss, Jr.
Chairman – Erin's Law Task Force

Erin's Law Task Force Members
Public Act 96-1524

Representative	Organization
Erin Merryn	Activist
Danny Langloss, Jr.	Dixon Police Chief / <i>Task Force Chairman</i>
Billie Larkin	Executive Director Children's Advocacy Centers of Illinois <i>Committee Chairperson: Research</i>
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Patrick Martin	Illinois Alliance of School Administrators Superintendent – District 50 Schools <i>Committee Chairman: Best Practices for Administrator and Teacher Education</i>
Roy Harley	Prevent Child Abuse of Illinois
Vernie Bruehler	Illinois Violence Prevention Authority
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Bonnie Schnirring	Illinois State Board of Education
Janet Kester	Illinois Federation of Teachers
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Lieutenant John Garner	Illinois State Police
Brooke Whitted	President – Leslie Shankman School Corporation
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Representative Jerry Mitchell	Illinois General Assembly
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**ERIN'S LAW TASK FORCE
FINAL REPORT TO GOVERNOR QUINN**

Introduction

On February 14, 2011, Governor Pat Quinn signed Public Act 96-1524. The Act created a task force on the prevention of child sexual abuse within the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The task force was named the Erin's Law Task Force and had 19 members. Members were required to be qualified by education or experience in the fields of prevention of child abuse and neglect.

P.A. 96-1524 required the Task Force to make recommendations for reducing child sexual abuse in Illinois based on the following activities:

1. Gather information concerning child sexual abuse throughout the State.
2. Receive reports and testimony from individuals, State and local agencies, community-based organizations, and other public and private organizations.
3. Create goals for State policy that would prevent child sexual abuse; and
4. Submit a final report with its recommendations to the Officer of the Governor and the General Assembly by January 1, 2012.

The Erin's Law Task Force was granted a 6 month extension to complete the final report from the Governor's Office. The report was due by June 1, 2012, and was timely submitted.

The statute provided as follows:

To adopt and implement a policy addressing sexual abuse of children that may include age-appropriate curriculum from students in pre-k through 5th grade; training of school personnel on child sexual abuse; education information to parents or guardians provided in the school handbook on the warning signs of a child being abused, along with any needed assistance, referral, or resource information; available counseling and resources for students affected by sexual abuse; and emotional and educational support for a child of abuse to continue to be successful in school.

We recognize that our recommendations may be difficult for some school districts to implement. We also recognize the significant number of mandates on schools, and that there are only so many hours in a school day. We recognize there will be some financial concerns. While recognizing these challenges, we must remember that if child sexual abuse were a disease, it would be one of the largest epidemics in our country, and resources would be allocated to wipe it out. **The recommendations contained in this report take this into consideration.**

This initiative directly relates to Illinois' commitment to eliminate harassment and protect children. The information in this document is shocking. In the wake of the recent Penn State scandal, we must take notice that the actions of those who did nothing to address clear allegations of child sexual abuse or even attempt to intervene to protect those children is unacceptable. Moreover, those who did nothing in that case are being subjected to the closest

media scrutiny. Likewise, it is just as unacceptable for the State of Illinois to do nothing and fail to move forward as a leader in our commitment to protecting Illinois children and doing as much as we can to eliminate child sexual abuse. The Task Force respectfully submits its report to the legislature.

II. The Need for Erin's Law

Author: Erin Merryn

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2006), one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday. There are an estimated 42 million survivors of sexual abuse in America. Three million of these victims are still children. These children could fill 46 football stadiums. Child sexual abuse is a preventable problem that has been allowed to grow due to societal silence. It isn't going to go away by ignoring it. It is only going to continue to grow.

My name is Erin Merryn. As a child growing up in Illinois schools, every year I participated in tornado drills, bus drills, fire drills, and learned about stranger danger and how to resist initiation of drug or alcohol use through DARE curriculum. I never had to duck and cover from a real tornado, escape a real bus emergency, or run out of a burning building. I knew not to talk to strangers or answer the door when my parents were not home. I knew the eight ways to say no to drugs, but where were the eight ways on, "How to get away or tell today?" They never came. I was molested and then raped from age 6 to 8 ½ by an adult neighbor and then molested from age 11 to 13 by an older cousin. I listened to the only message I was getting, and that came from my abusers, who told me this was "our secret." I was told that nobody would believe me, and that I would destroy our family if I told our secret. I stayed silent. These men had silenced my voice, killed my innocence, and took my trust.

Had my parents or teachers taught me about "safe touch" / "unsafe touch", "safe secrets" / "unsafe secrets", and empowered me with a voice, I would have been saved years of sexual abuse. I would have been educated to tell someone instead of staying silent. The only way I could express my secrets was through anger, because I did not have the vocabulary to tell someone. Weeks after I was raped, my sister pulled off my shoes the same way my rapist did triggering a flashback of being raped again. Because I didn't have the vocabulary to tell someone the secrets I carried, I put my hand through a window that night and nearly died. I was labeled with an "emotional and behavior disorder" at age seven. Chronic sexual abuse affected my grades throughout school. Nightmares affected my sleep and flashbacks distracted me in school. Specialists spent thousands of hours working with me, but never asked the important and hard questions. I felt so alone in my pain and confusion. Little did I know that sitting among me were other girls and boys who were keeping the same secrets, because nobody was teaching us to use our voice. We were too busy learning about "stranger danger" every year, when 93% of the time, children are sexually abused by *someone they know and trust*.

The first time sexual abuse was ever mentioned to me in school was in 10th grade health class, far too late. For the majority of students in Illinois, high school is the first time they hear anything about sexual abuse. Illinois schools by law under section 105 ILCS 110/3 are required to teach sexual assault education in all secondary schools. This education comes far too late for most children. Sexual abuse is a conversation very few parents have with their children. Too many parents assume their kids would tell them if someone ever abused them. They live in a good community, so it would “never happen to their children.” Little do they know that many times the abuser is someone living in the home. We cannot leave this conversation up to the parents, because the majority of them fail to talk about it. They are not equipped for this conversation. School is the one place children spend most of their time outside of their home. School is the place all children in our state can receive this message.

I cannot change the past, so I focus on the future. We need change to protect children. I envision a future where children in my state, country, and across this world are not failed the way I was failed as a child. I do not want to see another generation go uneducated on how to report sexual abuse to an adult until it stops. Every child deserves the right to have their minds, bodies, and innocence protected. They just need to be educated on how.

A National Institute of Justice study reported child sexual abuse carries a yearly cost to our country of \$35 billion a year. This alarming economic cost demonstrates that sexual abuse is a silent epidemic. My vision is to mandate age appropriate curriculum pre-k through 5<sup>th</sup> grade on sex abuse prevention. My hope is to empower Illinois children not to keep the secrets I carried as a child. The one thing I can reclaim from my childhood is my voice, and that is one thing I want to make sure children are empowered to use.

There are many low cost options to educating children on sexual abuse. Training in-house staff or using free programs offered by ICASA and Children’s Advocacy Centers of Illinois (CACI) are some examples.

My goal is for every state to adopt Erin’s law, as several other states are doing this year. Lawmakers in these states are watching Illinois and will likely follow the Illinois example. The children of Illinois can be an example for the prevention of sexual abuse.

Once children are educated, sexual abuse will no longer be a taboo topic. This law will not only lead to the developmentally appropriate education of children, but it will educate society in its entirety. I want to move the conversation about childhood sexual abuse prevention from one that occurs between perpetrator-victim to the classrooms in all schools and homes. The same way we would want a child to escape a burning building and say no to drugs, we want to teach school children how to say no to a sexual predator and escape further harm, or tell immediately after something happens instead of staying silent out of fear.

Many of the 3 million children in the United States who have been sexually abused are coming to school carrying these painful secrets. They are having trouble concentrating in school

due to the memories that haunt them. It is time we stand up for children and be a voice for the voiceless. While I know many children will find their voice through age appropriate curriculum, even if just one child is empowered to break the silence through education, he or she is one child who might otherwise suffer years of sexual abuse and not come forward until adulthood. Join me and help empower kids with their voice through Erin's Law. Do it for the children.

### III. Review of Research: Prevalence, Impact, Disclosure, & Reporting

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#### a. Prevalence, Psychological & Economic Impact of CSA

**Prevalence & offender characteristics.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2006), 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be the victim of child sexual abuse by the time they turn 18 years old. This means there are more than 42 million adult survivors of child sexual abuse in the United States. It is estimated that only 1 out of every 10 victims ever disclose their abuse (CACI, 2011). Ninety-three percent of these victims are abused by someone they know, someone in a position of trust or authority. There is no profile for a child sex offender. They cannot be picked out of a crowd. Offenders come from every socio-economic class, race, gender, profession, and religion. They have the title of dad, step-dad, grandpa, uncle, coach, lawyer, babysitter, police officer, fire fighter, judge, Boy Scout leader, pastor, teacher, mom, and step-mom. These offenders are generally viewed by their peers as law abiding citizens, are well educated, and have a strong religious background.

Offenders prey on the fact that society does not want to believe sexual abuse occurs. These child predators are masters of manipulation and are generally excellent communicators. They put themselves in positions where they have access to children. They generally start by gaining the trust, respect, and support of the parents. Then, they begin the “grooming” process with the selected victim. During this grooming process, the predator plays to the likes and needs of the child and determines if the child will keep this “secret.” Predators are very good at identifying child victims who are the least likely to tell or children who come from troubled backgrounds. If the child displays competencies that make him or her more likely to tell, the offender will move on to the next selected victim.

**Psychological, academic, and social effects of child sexual abuse.** Parents are not properly equipped to handle this difficult and dynamic situation. While not all victims of child sexual abuse suffer long lasting and devastating effects, many do. **Studies have consistently shown there is one major difference between victims who display significant issues and those who do not: The support of the mother (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Luster & Small, 1997; Merrill et al., 2001).** Society would expect a mother to always support her child. However in cases of child sexual abuse, frequently that does not happen. Often times the child’s greatest fears come true. They are not believed or supported by those they love and trust the most.

Trickett and colleagues (2011) completed a 23-year longitudinal study of the impact of child sexual abuse on female development and their findings indicated that youth who experienced CSA are likely to have a multitude of adverse outcomes. More specifically, these outcomes include early onset of puberty, cognitive deficits, depression, dissociative symptoms, maladaptive sexual development, high rates of obesity, more major illnesses and healthcare utilization, poor academic performance, dropping out of high school, persistent post traumatic stress disorder, self mutilation, and drug and alcohol abuse. A large number of female victims of child sexual abuse have a “markedly” increased risk for abuse in subsequent relationships or roles and are highly likely to manifest parental dysfunction.

While there are similarities in the effects between boy and girls, there are additional problems observed in male victims. Boys are more likely to exhibit aggressive, anti-social behavior. 33 percent of adult male child sex offenders report being a victim of child sexual abuse (Hindman & Peters, 2001) Male victims of child sexual abuse are twice as likely to commit violent crimes as adults (Siegel & Williams, 2003).

**Economic impact of CSA.** Approximately 9,850 children were served by Children's Advocacy Centers in Illinois last year (CACI, 2012). Child sexual abuse is the second most expensive victim crime in the United States, following murder, at \$35 Billion annually (D2L, 2012). The Erin's Law Task Force has reviewed not only what is currently happening in Illinois, but also the long term economic effects of child sexual abuse. The economic impact is staggering. For example, just the immediate impact of child sexual abuse in Illinois is \$141,728,600. The long term economic impact is \$1,459,804,580. (Source: www.d2l.org)

## **b. Disclosure of CSA**

In cases of child sexual abuse, delayed disclosure is the norm, not the exception. In fact, when victims do disclose their abuse, most of the time it is several years after the abuse has stopped (Smith et al., 2000). Children do not tell for several reasons: (1) They do not know the abuse is wrong; (2) They feel the abuse was their fault; (3) They do not know how to tell; (4) They do not know who to tell; (5) They are afraid no one will believe them; (6) They have been threatened by the offender; (7) They are afraid disclosure will hurt their family.

Many children have never been taught about "safe secrets" and "unsafe secrets", "safe touches" and "unsafe touches", and what to do when someone breaks the touching rule. They have not been empowered to tell their mom, dad, teacher, or counselor, and to keep telling until the abuse stops. Much like the story of Erin Merryn, many times the only message children are getting is from the perpetrator. Offenders tell children things like, "This is our secret", "Other people will be jealous of us", "They will take me away if you tell.", "If you tell, you will be taken from our family.", and "Nobody will believe you; you will be completely alone."

When the perpetrator instructs the child not to tell, it has a very powerful effect. It is even more powerful if the offender uses threats. Often times, abuse begins in early childhood and lasts for several years.

In 1983, Dr. Roland Summit published an article titled, "The Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome." While this syndrome cannot be used as a diagnostic tool, it does offer significant insight into how children experience abuse and why it is one of the most underreported crimes in the United States. The dynamics include secrecy, helplessness, entrapment and accommodation, delayed disclosures, and recantation. We must be guided by a few basic truths:

**(1) Children do not lie to get into trouble; they lie to get out of trouble.** When children come forward and allege sexual abuse, they fear they are going to be in trouble. They also feel the abuse was their fault and that they are alone. Several research projects show that

even when a child does disclose sexual abuse, they under-disclose their abuse by more than 50 percent (Cederborg, Lamb, & Laurell, 2007). In many cases, the perpetrator tells investigators more about the abuse than the child.

**(2) The child loves the perpetrator; they hate the act.** In 93 percent of cases, the child knows the offender. The offender is someone close to the child and is in a position of trust, respect and authority. Oftentimes, the child loves being with the perpetrator. They just want the abuse to stop.

**(3) Do not be surprised when the child recants, be surprised when they do not.** According to research, child victims take back their allegations 25% of the time in gold standard cases (Malloy, Lyon, Quas, & Forman, 2005). Gold standard cases are when the suspect has confessed, there is conclusive medical evidence, or there is video evidence of the abuse.

It is estimated that only 1 out of every 10 victims ever disclose their abuse (CACI, 2011). When a child does tell a family member they have been sexually abused, it is only reported to the authorities 6 to 12 percent of the time (Elliott, 1993; Saunders et al., 1992; Smith et al., 2000). More than 88 percent of the time, the offender is discovered and nothing happens to them. When offenders are “caught” and nothing is done, they become empowered to reoffend and often feel invincible (Vieth, 2011). This contributes significantly to these numbers: Men who abuse girls have an average of 19.8 victims; Men who abuse boys have an average of 150.2 victims (Salter, 2003).

### **c. Need for standardized training for CSA mandated reporters**

Failure to fulfill mandated reporter requirements has become the norm, not the exception (Vieth, 2011). The failure of numerous mandated reporters at Penn State to take appropriate action in the face of clear evidence of child sexual abuse exemplifies the need for reform across our country. In that case, athletic status trumped propriety, for years.

A 2000 study found that 65 percent of social workers, 53 percent of physicians, and 58 percent of physician’s assistants were not reporting all cases of suspected abuse (DeLoaronde et al., 2000). Only 26 percent of teachers said they would report a situation where a child told them that their stepfather had touched their genitals and only 11 percent said they would report a situation where a teacher had touched a child’s genitals (Kenny, 2001).

Mandated reporters fail to report for a number of reasons. These include but are not limited to insufficient evidence, uncertainty, worries about causing additional harm, and maintaining good relationships (Kenny, 2001).

A lack of training and the quality of training may play a significant role in these findings. In a 2011 survey of mandated reporters in Pennsylvania, 14% of respondents said they had never received mandated reporter training and 24% said they had not received this training within the last 5 years (Vieth, 2011). In Illinois, mandated reporters must certify in writing that they have received appropriate training (325 ILCS 5/4, see attached form).

#### **d. Implications for state policy on CSA prevention**

Very few cases of child sexual abuse involve force. These are most often cases of manipulation. Most of the reported cases of abuse do not begin with sexual penetration. The abuse begins with grooming, then inappropriate sexual contact, and becomes more significant over time.

By proactively building competencies in children regarding child sexual abuse prevention, we can accomplish three important goals: (1) Children are less likely to be sexually abused; (2) Children are more likely to come forward immediately if they are sexually abused; and (3) Children are more likely to be referred to appropriate services and less likely to suffer long term negative effects, thereby consuming societal resources.

If a child reports abuse immediately to a mandated reporter, an investigation can be completed by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and/or the police. (See attached written confirmation form). The child can receive counseling immediately and significantly reduce the long lasting and devastating effects of child sexual abuse. The offender will be held accountable immediately for his/her actions, which will significantly reduce the number of victims per perpetrator. In effect, the number of total child sexual abuse victims will be reduced.

Not only is this significant from a humanistic perspective, it will have a long-term positive economic impact for Illinois. **Child sexual abuse prevention programs in our schools are a low cost alternative for a very positive outcome, not only for our children, but also for the State of Illinois.**

#### IV. Efficacy/Effectiveness of CSA programs for K-12

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##### a. CSA prevention approaches

A review conducted by the leading US scholar in CSA prevention (Finkelhor, 2009) indicated that there are two major sexual abuse prevention efforts that have been underway for the last few decades. One strand of prevention efforts include criminal justice initiatives aimed at offenders and informing the community about CSA. A second strand includes educational initiatives where prevention efforts are focused on educating children, and also imparting knowledge and skills to parents, families, and other adults who are responsible for intervening to prevent CSA. Through these largely curricula-based prevention efforts, children are taught to recognize unhealthy boundaries, unhealthy touching, grooming methods of offenders, refusing or breaking off relations with offenders, seeking help from safe adults, and managing emotional guilt and blame associated with abuse.

##### b. Reviews & meta-analytic studies of CSA prevention efficacy

Finkelhor (2009) points out that there have been very few large-scale experimental, rigorous evaluations of the impact of educational programs to prevent sexual abuse; however, small scale studies support continued implementation of these educational programs. For example, in a survey of 825 college students, women who had participated in a school-based prevention (62% reported a “good touch-bad touch” type of program) were 50% less likely to have reported being a victim of CSA than those college-age women who were not exposed to such a curriculum (Gibson & Leitenberg, 2000). In contrast, another study of two-waves of a national survey of victimization rates among youth (ages 10 to 16) found no differences in victimization rates between youth exposed to such programs and those not exposed (Finkelhor, Asdigian, & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995). However, students who were part of CSA educational prevention efforts reported greater efficacy in managing and stopping subsequent victimization, an important step in preventing CSA at the national level. **In other words, childhood sexual abuse prevention programs reduce the potential pool of victims for sexual predators through childhood and adulthood.**

In a meta-analytic (statistical summary of research evaluations of CSA programs) of 27 school-based studies that included a control/comparison group, targeted youth ages 3 to 13 years of age, Davis and Gidyca (2000) found that children who participated in school-based CSA prevention programs had improved knowledge and skills related to CSA than children in the control or comparison who did not receive the prevention materials. **Programs had the largest positive effects if they use dolls, puppets, worked with younger versus older youth, included more than 4 sessions, and engaged the youth in behavioral training and practice.**

More recently, Kenny and colleagues reviewed 21 studies of CSA school-based prevention efforts (Kenny, Thakkar-Kolar, Ryan, & Runyon, 2008). The most common positive effects reported by children are increases in a sense of control and feelings of safety, programs that included active participation of parents in promoting self-protection, and again found that programs that are presented in 4 or more sessions had the best gains.

## Summary & Conclusions

Overall, the research suggests that youth can acquire the skills that are presented in many school-based CSA prevention programs and contribute to increases in disclosure, decreases in self-blame, and in some cases reduce victimization.

Finkelhor (2009) has concluded that the declines in sexual abuse since 1993 in our nation may well be related to prevention education programs in schools and communities. He adds that although quality of programs might vary, there is sufficient evidence to continue to engage youth in these education programs and extend them to include parent, teacher, and community member trainings. Programs that include greater than 4 sessions, utilize puppet shows for younger kids, and engage all youth in behavioral training should be key components of school-based programs.

To put it simply, children who are provided with childhood sexual abuse prevention instruction are less likely to go along with a perpetrator to keep a secret and will be more likely to tell someone. As a result, perpetrators will have to continue to search for victims who will go along with their grooming and tactics to maintain silence. **Ultimately, as children are educated about self protection and speaking out, they will be able to protect themselves. As adults, they will be able to protect their own children and end the intergenerational code of silence that pervades our society regarding childhood sexual abuse.** These programs have the potential to substantially reduce child sexual abuse in Illinois.

## V. Best Practice Recommendations for Administrator and Teacher Education

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### RESEARCH AND COMMISSION FOCUS:

Despite the use of different definitions, populations, and methods, prevalence studies indicate far higher levels of child sexual abuse than incidence statistics suggest. In the United States, between 8% and 71% of the female population report some form of sexual victimization, compared with 3% to 37% of the male population (Rind, Tromovitch, & Bauserman, 1998). The peak ages of vulnerability are from ages 7 to 13, although reports also indicate that one-third to one-half of child sexual abuse victims are under the age of 7 (Briere et al., 1996; Finkelhor, 1994). The incidence of child sexual abuse for children with disabilities is 1.75 times greater than for children without disabilities (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1993). The sexual abuse of children occurs across every class/social economic status, race, religion, neighborhood, cultural group, and ethnic group.

This is an example of the research that has spurred ongoing discussion through several sessions and provided evidence as part of the task force commissioned by Governor Quinn lending oversight to Erin's Law. As the representative of the Illinois School Management Alliance and the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA), I was given the task of providing the best practice recommendations for Administrator, Teacher, and Parent Education on the topic of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA).

### INITIAL OBJECTIVES OF THE TASK FORCE:

Erin Merryn is the driving force behind this legislation, Public Act 096-1524, and subsequent legislation that will be proposed following the Task Force's report to the Governor due June 1, 2012. She has successfully worked for the passage of P.A. 96-1524 (Erin's Law) and has helped to pass similar legislation in other states throughout the nation. Her aim is to "empower kids to use their voice in the case that something happens to them." The statute has a three-pronged approach through this Task Force and impending legislation:

#### **Mandate the education of students, staff, and family about sexual assault and awareness in schools by...**

- Creating/Recommending an age-appropriate curriculum for students grades pre-Kindergarten – 5th
- Providing Effective Professional Development for Educators
- Partnering with Parents for education on the Importance of Awareness and Strategy

### ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER EDUCATION REPORT:

It is important to note that legislation already mandates training related to Child Abuse and Neglect under 105 ILCS 5/10-20.25 associated with proper reporting and prevention. What is being proposed through the work of this Task Force report is that training for educators be offered through various professional development platforms to include the topic of Child Sexual

Abuse (CSA). As a greater number of sexual abuse cases become public (i.e., Penn State University Athletic Program Incident, Syracuse University Athletic Program Incident, AAU Junior Basketball Program Incident), discussion has been had by this commission surrounding the notion that certain traits and identifiers may be evident in students that educators in the classroom and in school can recognize enabling them to provide systems of support. In order to properly assess potential circumstances surrounding CSA cases, relay information via their role as Mandated Reporter, and provide appropriate follow-up and care for abused students as they return to the classroom setting, a greater degree of education for school personnel can be recommended through pre-existing professional development platforms.

- **Getting the Message of Erin’s Law to the Pre-K through 5 School Community:**

Through discussions with the Task Force, it was recommended that platforms such as the Illinois Principals Association (IPA) Annual Conference, Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) Annual Conference, and Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) Annual Conference be forums in which large groups of educational leaders and educators can be provided with the important message of Erin’s Law. With the potential for these conferences and others serving as a springboard for communicating the important elements of the law, attention on the topic will likely lend itself to educators in the field following up with professional development opportunities of their own.

- **Providing the Platform for Training:**

*Illinois School Administrators*

The Illinois School Code already requires that administrators further their own expertise in the area of student achievement and development through what is known as the Illinois Administrator Academy. Effective June 30, 2004; Public Act 093-0679 altered the administrator certificate renewal process for acting and future school administrators and set requirements for fulfillment and maintenance of Type 75 certification. According to the Administrator Academy Policy and Procedure Manual (2008), based on legislative changes established in 2004, public school administrators are now required to complete the following for each fiscal year (July 1 – June 30) of the certificate’s registration period:

1. Engage in participation in continuing professional development activities that must total a minimum of 100 hours (for a five-year validity period) or an average of 20 hours per year when less than five years remains in the validity period. The participation must consist of a minimum of five activities per validity period (or one per year if less than five years are remaining in the validity period), and the certificate holder must maintain documentation of completion of each activity.

2. Engage in participation every year in the fiscal year in an Illinois Administrators' Academy course that must include completion of applicable required coursework, including completion of a communication, dissemination, or application component, as defined by the Illinois State Board of Education.

Each program or professional development activity that principals in the state of Illinois are seeking to count as creditable within the Administrator Academy must include the following purposes:

1. To improve the administrator's knowledge of instructional practices and administrative procedure in accordance with the Illinois Professional School Leaders Standards;
2. To maintain the basic level of competence required for initial certification; and
3. To improve administrator's mastery of skills and knowledge regarding the improvement of teaching performance in clinical settings and assessments of the levels of student performance in schools (AAPPM, 2008, p. 5).

As discussed in Task Force meetings and recommended in this report, the Illinois Administrator Academy network would be an ideal mode for providing Illinois Administrators with training based on the elements of Erin's Law.

### ***Illinois School Teachers***

As with Illinois Administrators, Teachers are also required to fulfill an obligation to continue their education for certificate renewal. Initial certificate holders can use a number of professional development activities outlined in legislation that are assigned "point values" called "Continuing Professional Development Units" (CPDUs).

Educators can use a number of professional development activities to meet requirements for:

- moving from Initial to Standard teaching certification;
- meeting certificate renewal requirements for Standard/Master early childhood, elementary, secondary and special teaching certificates; and
- meeting certificate renewal requirements for School Service Personnel certificates.

The activities that require an approved provider are as follows:

- Workshops, seminars, conferences, symposia and similar training events for which certificate holders earn Continuing Professional Development Units (CPDUs);
- Induction and Mentoring Programs;
- Self-assessment coursework; and
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification prep coursework.

Our recommendation is that those entities demonstrating an interest in providing professional development for Illinois Teachers in the area of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) gain approval through the Professional Development Provider System (PDP). All approvals for providing such a professional development platform must take place through the PDP process.

#### Workshops, Conference, Symposia, and Similar Trainings

Approved providers of workshops, conferences, etc., must complete the top portion of the following forms and distribute them at the conclusion of the activity they are offering: the evaluation (ISBE 77-21A) and evidence of completion (77-21B). Providers collect and maintain completed evaluation forms for three years. The participants keep the evidence form. Attendance records must be kept for five years. (Providers offering activities outside of Illinois or in Illinois on a national level or those that offer online activities are not required to be approved or distribute the forms.)

Educators maintain the evidence of completion in a portfolio that must be available in the event they are selected for audit. Schools or districts that offer professional development should note that the evidence form is issued for conferences, workshops or similar trainings and not for “housekeeping” activities. The law allows one CPDU per contact hour and Continuing Professional Development Units (CPDUs) can be earned one per contact hour, excluding breaks and lunch.

#### RECOMMENDED COMPONENTS OF TRAINING FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, AND COUNSELORS WOULD INCLUDE:

Training for school administrators, staff, and counselors should provide the following information:

- Overview of Dynamics of Child Sexual Abuse
  - Reliability of children
  - Grooming
  - Secrecy
  - Verbal threats
  - Physical force
  - Imbalance of power
  - Factors influencing the recover of a child

- Recantation
- How to Handle a Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse
  - Remain calm.
  - Provide positive reinforcement to the child.
  - Reassure the child he/she did the right thing by telling.
  - Don't investigate, just report.
  - Provide support for the victim and family.
  - Withhold judgment.
- Questions to Ask and Not to Ask a Child who Discloses Sexual Abuse
  - Do not interview the child. The fewer questions the better.
  - Let the child talk, use active listening skills.
  - Tell them you are going to get them help.
- The Mandated Reporter Law
  - Elements of the law.
  - Ensuring that every mandated reporter has a signed acknowledgment of training in his or her personnel file, as required by statute.
  - The multi-disciplinary team (MDT)
    - DCFS
    - Law Enforcement
    - Prosecutors
    - Children's Advocacy Center
  - Enhanced disciplinary enforcement against licensed professionals who knowingly fail to report.

## **VI. Core Components of Effective and Comprehensive Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs**

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The Task Force recommends that, to effectively address the issue of child sexual abuse in Illinois, all public schools should implement a child sexual abuse prevention program with students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 5. Members of this Task Force reviewed a variety of existing prevention curricula. However, recognizing the limited research available on the effects of specific curricula and the diversity of needs, resources and student populations in Illinois schools, the Task Force has chosen not to promote any specific prevention curriculum. Rather, we recommend the following core components from which each school or district can craft an effective and comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention program.

1. Programs should include techniques to teach children to recognize child sexual abuse, equip them with skills to reduce their vulnerability and encourage them to report the abuse.
2. Programs should include more than one session, ideally, at least four (Davis & Gidycz, 2000). Recognizing the importance and effectiveness of an environmental design, programs may include such building interventions as visual aids displayed throughout the school, reinforcing the concepts learned within the prevention program (Taylor, Stein, Woods, Mumford, & Mennemeier, 2011)
3. Programs should be conducted at least annually, building on skills learned the previous year, and should be developmentally appropriate for each grade level.
4. Programs should involve children as active learning participants and should to be the most effective, include discussion, modeling and role playing (Davis & Gidycz, 2000).
5. Programs should have the capacity to be delivered by a wide range of personnel (Barron & Topping, 2010). Acknowledging the varying resources and staffing patterns of each school, prevention programs should have the capacity to be delivered by a wide range of professionals, including teachers, school counselors, outside agency prevention educators, etc. Professionals delivering these prevention programs should have a thorough knowledge of child sexual abuse, including how to respond appropriately to disclosures.
6. Programs should include an evaluation component with measurable outcomes.
7. Programs should be culturally sensitive and adaptable for use within varying school contexts (age, race, special needs, etc.).
8. Although we recognize that thorough research is limited on the efficacy of specific child sexual abuse prevention programs, we recommend that schools seek to implement programs that include an evidence-based curriculum.
9. Programs must include a professional training component for administrators, teachers and other school personnel on talking to students about child sexual abuse prevention, effects of child sexual abuse on children, handling disclosures, and mandated reporting.
10. Recognizing that parents play a key role in protecting children from abuse, programs must include a component that encourages parental involvement within the child sexual abuse prevention program. This component should inform parents about child sexual abuse topics including but not limited to characteristics of offenders, grooming behaviors, and how to discuss this topic with their children (Kenny, 2010)

**To assist schools in implementing effective child sexual abuse prevention programs, the Task Force has identified the following statewide resources:**

1. Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault (ICASA)  
100 N. 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
Springfield, IL 62703  
(217)753-4117  
<http://www.icasa.org>  
ICASA consists of 33 sexual assault centers and 26 satellite offices across the state that provide prevention education programs to schools and professional training to school personnel.
2. Child Advocacy Centers of Illinois  
1133 S. Second Street  
Springfield, IL 62704  
(217)528-2224  
<http://www.cacionline.org>  
CACI consists of 39 children's advocacy centers (CACs) across the state. In addition to their work coordinating investigations of child sexual abuse and serious physical abuse, several CACs facilitate community-based and school-based prevention programs.

## **VII. Current Illinois Law**

Education within public schools on sexual development and victimization prevention are already required by law. The “Health Education Act”, 105 ILCS 110/3, requires sexual assault awareness in secondary schools. Secondary schools are defined as grades 9 through 12.

Illinois Statute at 105 ILCS 5/27-9.1, titled “Sex Education”, requires specific guidelines for schools offering “comprehensive sex education” in grades 6 through 12. Specific requirements for instruction are listed within the law. Subsection (8) states, “Course material and instruction shall teach pupils to not make unwanted physical and verbal sexual advances and how to say no to unwanted sexual advances.” The section further states, “The material and instruction shall also encourage youth to resist negative peer pressure.”

Another Illinois Statute at 105 ILCS 5/27-13.3, titled “Internet Safety Education Curriculum”, states, “a school district must incorporate into the school curriculum a component on Internet safety to be taught at least once each school year to students in grades 3 through 12.” As outlined in the law, “The purpose of this Section is to inform and protect students from inappropriate or illegal communications and solicitation and to encourage school districts to provide education about Internet threats and risks, including without limitation child predators, fraud, and other dangers.” A portion of the recommendations for the unit of instruction include, “Recognizing, avoiding, and reporting online solicitations of students, their classmates, and their friends by sexual predators.”

## **VIII. Conclusions and Recommendations:**

The story of Erin Merryn is just one example of more than 42 million stories of child sexual abuse survivors across the United States. Her courage and determination have allowed her to be a face and a voice for survivors of child sexual abuse. Erin is constantly attacking this “silent epidemic”. She travels the country year round to share her message. She has been an inspiration and a source of healing. Her vision has evolved. Erin’s dream is to give children a voice through school-based child sexual abuse prevention programs. Illinois was the first state to enact her legislation. She has inspired eleven other states to adopt or formalize a plan to enact this law, and these states are looking to the proactive leadership of Illinois.

Every child deserves the right to have their minds, bodies, and innocence protected. It is time we stand up for children and give a voice to the voiceless. Schools are the most effective way to make sure every child receives this important message. Illinois will be an example for the entire country on the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Information contained in this report has outlined the prevalence of child sexual abuse. Many victims of sexual abuse are under the age of 7 (Briere et al., 1996; Finkelhor, 1994). It is too late for most children who receive prevention education under Illinois law. This does not mean the current law is not important or effective; rather, **our findings strongly suggest the need to simply begin prevention education earlier in the school curriculum.**

**Schools providing child sexual abuse education is not a new initiative.** Hundreds of schools in Illinois already have programs in place. Mandates under the “Health Education Act”, “Sex Education”, and “Internet Safety Education Curriculum” require instruction beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The following recommendations enhance and improve current Illinois law to make our children safer.

### **The Erin’s Law Task Force recommendations:**

- Child sexual abuse prevention education should be taught in grades pre-K through 5. “Best Practices” should be included in this instruction (See page 16 of this report).
- Training for school administrators should be amended to include child sexual abuse as a selective strand under the Illinois Administrator Academy.
- Child sexual abuse training should be provided as a certified professional development unit (CPDU) for certified non-administrative school personnel.

OPTION FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

Revise the school code related to “Health Education” (105 ILCS 110/3) from “sexual assault awareness in secondary schools” to “age appropriate sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention education in grades pre-K through 12”.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES:

ICASA and CACI provide free child sexual abuse prevention programs across the state. A list of available resources for ICASA and CACI are attached to this report.

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