

Good Morning Chairman Clymer and Chairman Roebuck and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Ed Marsico, and I am the District Attorney of Dauphin County. I am here to speak with you about the merits of HB 2318.

We have all heard the statistics regarding crimes of child exploitation – and they are staggering. An estimated 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused as children. Today, children are the victims in nearly 70% of reported sexual assaults. Looking to the future, 500,000 of the babies born this year will be sexually abused as children - unless we do something to prevent it. Great organizations and great people are working tirelessly each and every day to do just that.

And although much work has been done, today's hard economic climate and the need for constant budget cuts threaten to derail these efforts at the very moment that they are needed most. That's precisely why legislation such as HB 2318 is so important.

This legislation recognizes a harsh reality: the world today is a scary place for a kid to grow up. The crimes we are here speaking about are widespread - they cross state lines and county lines. They effect children in our most affluent communities and in our most impoverished; and in our urban and rural communities alike. These crimes are not limited to any particular race, religions, gender, or social status. Every child is at risk and the odds are overwhelming that a child or someone close to them will suffer abuse.

As widespread as these crimes may be, we constantly hear of cases of abuse that goes on for years before it is reported. The reason for this is clear: when young children are abused they may not understand what is happening to them or that it is wrong. And even if children do recognize the abuse, they may not know where or how to report it. As a result, an entire childhood may be defined by years of repeated abuse - and the abuser remains free to hurt the child and possibly target others.

This legislation not only identifies this problem – it recognizes the solution. The reality is that by spreading awareness of these crimes, we can prevent them. This legislation ensures that awareness begins early - in elementary school. And in two key respects, the legislation assists schools with developing appropriate lesson plans. First, it calls on the Department of Education to develop a model curriculum so that schools have guidance in presenting such sensitive information to children. For while protecting kids is the fundamental objective, the legislation properly emphasizes the need for lessons to be age-appropriate. And second, it encourages educators and community experts in child abuse work as partners in developing curricula.

As a result, children will learn about risks and how to recognize warning signs of abuse. And, as kids grow and mature, this curriculum will develop with them. This education will give our children strength. They will recognize dangerous situations and they will know how and when to report them. In this way, children will be in a position to look out not only for themselves, but for one another. And all of these efforts culminate to keep kids safer.