

# My Turn: Alaska is ready for Erin's Law

Posted: January 20, 2015

By [DAVID HOLTHOUSE](#)  
FOR THE JUNEAU EMPIRE

The cure for Alaska's epidemic of childhood sexual abuse begins with breaking the silence. It's time to give Alaskan kids the tools they need.

When I was a little boy growing up in Anchorage, I knew just what to do if I caught on fire: Stop, drop, and roll. I knew because they taught me in school, just like they later taught me to "Just say no" to drugs. The lesson was mandatory.

What I didn't know is what to do after I was raped when I was 7 years old. I didn't know what to do when the rapist threatened to kill me and my parents if I told anyone.

I didn't know at the time what rape was. I thought it was a freak occurrence, making me a freak. And so I didn't tell. I kept it to myself for 25 years and suffered in silence — the same way thousands upon thousands of Alaskan victims of childhood sexual abuse are suffering now. They are suffering without the tools they need to cope and expose their abusers.

Abuse can be overwhelming; fortunately, the Legislature is close to making real progress in giving Alaskan kids the tools they need to stand up to this abuse. It's time to pass "Erin's Law".

Erin Merryn made a strong impression when she shared her story with legislators last year in Juneau. Erin was sexually abused by a family member as a child. Now a leader in preventing abuse, she is determined to see all 50 states adopt "Erin's Law."

Erin's Law requires school districts to provide age-appropriate curriculum about personal body safety. It also gives teachers, staff and administrators the tools they need to respond properly to allegations of childhood sexual abuse. The Erin's Law catchphrase is: "Get away, tell today."

That message cannot be spread or strengthened enough. To that end, I implore citizens to contact their state representative. Urge them to pass Erin's Law this session.

Nineteen states have passed Erin's Law. Last year, Erin's Law passed in the Alaska Senate but failed to pass in the Alaska House of Representatives. With early bi-partisan support, there's no reason Erin's Law cannot become law this year — abuse is not a freak occurrence.

One in six boys and one in four girls in the U.S. are sexually abused. Nine times out of 10 it's by someone they know.

We teach kids what to do if there is a fire, earthquake or other emergency. We must face the reality that more of these students will be harmed by sexual abuse than by these other threats. Teaching kids about personal body safety is essential to keeping them safe. Let your legislator know that it's time to pass Erin's Law.