

From: [Sen. Anna MacKinnon](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: FW: today's LIO hearing testimony
Date: Wednesday, June 10, 2015 5:48:34 PM

From: Toni Roberts [mailto:akrealtortoni@gmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, June 10, 2015 4:07 PM
To: Sen. Click Bishop; Sen. Mike Dunleavy; Sen. Lyman Hoffman; Sen. Anna MacKinnon; Sen. Pete Kelly; Sen. Peter Micciche; Sen. Donny Olson
Subject: today's LIO hearing testimony

This is the original message I would have liked to have shared today if I had been given the time. Unfortunately, the 2 to 3 minutes available simply do not allow for all information to be shared. I do sincerely appreciate your time today, and hope that you find other ways to implement the ideas and issues that were added to the original HB 44 and keep the simple version of HB 44; that is what is best for the children of our state.

Thank you,
Toni Roberts

I am here today to testify before you in support of the Alaska Safe Children's Act. As a citizen of this state, born and raised, I am extremely concerned with the way some of you legislators are toying with our children's well-being, for no reason other than to play politics. It is disgusting, and while I wish I could apologize and say I mean no disrespect, the fact of the matter is that it is difficult, if not nearly impossible, to respect ANY person that would politicize our children's safety.

I just completed my 16th year teaching middle school here in the Anchorage School District. During that time, I also obtained my master's degree in educational leadership, allowing me to take over the role as administrator at any school in Alaska, grades K-12. I am also a parent. Those hats that I wear often overlap in their goals, roles, and responsibilities, and never has that been more clear than when it comes to working to get House Bill 44 passed AS IT WAS INITIALLY WRITTEN.

As a teacher who has taught Health to 8th grade students here in Anchorage and sat through the giggling, the silly faces, the 'ewwws' and 'gross' comments, when I became a parent I knew one thing for sure - I was going to use the correct terminology for body parts so my children would not giggle as much when they heard the word 'penis' or 'vagina'. I would answer my children's questions about sexuality, our bodies, without so much as a hint of discomfort. At home, we were adamant about allowing personal space when asked for, keeping our private parts private, and setting our own clear boundaries that others were not allowed to violate. I felt, as a mom AND as a teacher, that my kids would be the best educated when it came to how the body works, what was appropriate, what wasn't, and feel comfortable discussing these topics. Little did I know that my best efforts could not protect my own children. Even with my best efforts and intentions, while away at his father's just last summer, my 9 year old little boy was raped on multiple occasions by a high school neighbor. If there is anything I do feel grateful for, it is that he felt safe enough to ask me questions

about sex and sexuality that were specific enough and repeated enough even after being given the answer to cause me to ask, 'Why are you asking me these things?' and, with tears running down his face, he revealed what had happened. How many other children are suffering in silence?

Please note that I use the word rape when I share what happened to my son. While many people tip toe around the topic, sometimes not even comfortable enough to use the term sexual abuse, please know that what is happening to MANY of the children in this state is what any adult would refer to as rape; often terrifying, physically and emotionally painful, and NEVER welcome or okay!

Perhaps some of you can imagine what it must be like for these children - having an older, stronger person that you had trusted violate you in ways your body and mind cannot possibly be ready for. But I have a feeling you have no idea. Let me paint you a picture of what my son has been going through, and consider just how many children are dealing with these same emotional issues. Remember, too, that it isn't only the victim that is hurting...

My son is funny, articulate, athletic, and has a heart of gold. He is a student in the gifted program. He has friends and family that love him beyond what any words can describe, as was evidenced by the sheer number of people that were in the courtroom the day his perpetrator was sentenced. He is not JUST a number - he is very real, and he is hurting. All the wonderful things about him are now hidden behind his anger, fear, and sadness. He is not the same young man he was before his innocence was stolen.

The winter before his perpetrator so boldly locked him in his own closet and sodomized him in the first of numerous attacks on an innocent little boy, we took a great picture of my son jumping his snowmachine. You see, my son was a dare-devil, loved to ride his dirt bike, created BMX and scooter courses to practice tricks. He had BIG dreams of living large, he was fearless, but surprisingly thoughtful and safe in his activities. Michael was a talented athlete - has been able to hit a baseball pitched to him since he was only a year old. He is tiny, wiry - still just over 60 pounds and about to turn 10 years old. He is fast, has eyes of an eagle, and amazing hand-eye coordination.

Michael was extremely social. He was confident in who he was without being arrogant. He was friendly and cared for others - anywhere we went, Michael had a new friend within only a few minutes. He enjoyed playing with other children, laughing, and finding common ground. He had, or at least requested to have, play dates literally DAILY, and not having friends over for at least a few hours every weekend was strange for him. Michael had that dynamic personality that people were drawn to - the kind of charisma you see in the best leaders of our world: kind, thoughtful, helpful, and full of love, while still being very childlike in that he could be selfish, throw tantrums, refuse to help clean up his mess, argue about not wanting to go to bed, and wanting to play video games rather than do chores.

That Michael, the amazing young man with the brightest smile and carefree attitude, is gone, or at least so deeply hidden that he doesn't feel that part of him exists anymore. The Michael we see today is fearful, sad, angry. He would not ride his dirt bike last summer at all - too afraid. This past winter, he rode his snow machine one time on a short trail ride...but didn't want to get too far from the cabin where we were staying. He now has a journal where he draws very dark pictures, writes out his feelings of sadness and anger in words we don't use, and 9 year olds certainly should not be using. He struggles every night to go to sleep. On our

recent vacation, he slept with me every night because he was too afraid to sleep in the bedroom next door. He asks his little sister to turn on lights for him because he is afraid to go anywhere with the least bit of shadow - even if the sun is beaming in the windows. He has only a couple of friends that he feels safe with and enjoys play dates with and while they are here playing, he is happy and is okay being away from me. When they leave, and he is left alone with the thoughts and painful memories in his head, he then reverts to quiet non-social activities like reading, drawing pictures of war, playing on his iPad, playing with his tanks, airplanes and ships...but always needing to be near me.

He has always loved me...little boys typically love their mommies...but he has needed me more than ever before. He cannot go to sleep without me by his side, rubbing his back until he drifts away, or holding him tight so he knows he is safe. When he is away from me, he contacts me late into the night to tell me he needs me, he is afraid, he is crying for me. He asked me to walk him in to school every day, always finding a way to see if I can stay just a minute or two more. If I can't walk him in to school because I have to rush to work for a parent meeting or other type of meeting, he is upset, sometimes tells me I must not love him, asking why am I so mean, and so on. At home, if I leave the room for more than a minute or two, he shows up next to me, afraid because I didn't come right back. He asks me every day to help him brush his teeth. For a while, he had quit tying his shoes - said he couldn't. He wouldn't change his own clothes - he wanted me to pick his outfit and get him dressed each day. He has only recently started getting his own snacks, cereal, and other small items again. This gifted child reverted in every way possible, which we have learned from his counselor is very common in children who have been sexually abused and assaulted to the extent Michael was. I don't mind helping him while he slowly heals and begins to recoup those skills that he seems to have lost, but what breaks my heart the most is that for all of these things, on the heels of asking for help, he is constantly apologizing. He feels awful that he cannot do the most simple things on his own. On more occasions than I can count, I have shared with Michael, and his counselor has worked with him to understand, that he has NOTHING to be sorry for. If he needs me, I will be there. If he is afraid, I will help him find a way to feel safe. He does not need to apologize for what he is feeling, which ultimately is because of post-traumatic stress. His feelings of self-esteem have plummeted because he simply feels so 'low'. He is, without a doubt, struggling with depression.

Michael gets very angry and while is typically on his best behavior in school, the darkness still creeps in - but he is blessed to have had an amazing teacher that worked with him, giving him time to draw, move to a quiet place, or just take a break when he needed to. He has the blessing of a very large step-father that allows Michael to wrestle or fight or just take his aggression out when he needs to, but he also has a little sister that gets dirty looks from her idol, gets yelled out, and gets wrestled or pillow-fought much more roughly than Michael has ever in the past, when it was always in fun. Michael has mentioned many times that he wants to die, sharing that when he does die, he is going to punch God in the face for letting this happen to him. Only a month or so ago, Michael was struggling so badly and in such a rage that my husband went to Fred Meyer to try to find SOMETHING Michael could use to punch, kick, hit...he found a pool noodle, brought it home, and Michael hit every object he could find as hard as he could, then broke down bawling for over 30 minutes, until he fell asleep in my arms. He never spoke about what he was feeling, other than to say he was angry, but his overwhelming sadness at the end of it spoke volumes about the struggle he is in each and every day.

Michael will live the rest of his life with the scar and pain of what happened - with the

memory being triggered at the most inopportune times, such as changing in a locker room (which he refuses to do), going through puberty when he finally begins to understand JUST how wrong what happened to him was, when he decides to have an intimate relationship with someone he loves, when he has his own children and is scared to let them have friends over out of fear that they could wind up as victims, and many other instances that may arise. He is not going to 'snap out of it' because his rapist is in prison, and in fact his counselor has mentioned he is not even ready to work through the victim narrative, which is a huge and important step in the healing process.

Michael wasn't the only person affected by this situation, and I could go on and on about who has been affected by the abuse my child suffered, but I know you have heard and will continue to hear further information on this topic today. Keep in mind, however, that it is NOT only the child that is affected - when they go to school angry, it can be an entire classroom of children that pay the price. It can be the teacher having to work more on classroom management than actually teaching a lesson. It can be a parent, at their wits end, exhausted and depressed, unable to go to work.

My son's entire life has been affected beyond what you or I, or any of us, could possibly comprehend, however he was fortunate in that he received justice for what he went through at the hands of this pedophile - that young man was sentenced as an adult to 30 years in prison. However, there are many children that have not come forward, don't feel safe enough to come forward, or don't know HOW to come forward. That is the intent of House Bill 44 - to give the children the knowledge they need to keep themselves safe and, if God forbid they are in a situation that is unsafe, they have the words and strength to report the information to someone immediately.

The initial House Bill was short, sweet, to the point. It was easy to read and offered a simple direction - to train employees, therefore teaching ALL students in grades K-12, about sexual abuse and assault, as well as dating violence and abuse, in an age-appropriate manner. There is even wording allowing a parent to opt out. Why did the Education Committee have such a major problem with that, that they instead wrote in wording that would require parents to opt-IN? And why in the world would any of you go along with that? I know there has since been a change. Why have we included rules for School Boards? Why would we include physical examinations for teachers? Why are we playing politics with who can and cannot come in to the schools to teach about STDs instead of focusing on keeping our kids safe? I don't care WHO teaches the information - get the information to the kids and lower our rate of sexual violence in this state!

While we like to think parents are teaching their children, and many of us are, the reality is that the more information the children are provided, the greater the possibility that 1) they will trust their gut when something doesn't feel right, 2) report someone that is treating them inappropriately, and 3) and perhaps most importantly, we as a society will quit giving the pedophiles, the child rapists, a place to hide. No more will the victims be made to feel bad, dirty or wrong, but everyone will KNOW that the perpetrators are the ones that should be condemned. As long as we make this topic taboo, and try NOT to offend people that don't want to talk about this topic, making what should be a simple law instead 12 PAGES of nonsense, all we are doing is continuing to give power to those that have abused our children for too long.

A few final notes as I wrap up today: To Mr. and Mrs. Moore, thank you for your efforts in

memory of your lovely daughter. As you may or may not be aware, I was one of her former teacher's and coaches, and feel so blessed to have known her. I am sorry for your loss, and certainly hope that her death was not in vain. Your efforts are to be commended. In regard to my own son - I cannot help but wonder if he had other sources outside of his immediate family teaching him about sexual abuse, keeping himself safe, what was and was not okay, if he would have had the tools necessary to keep himself safe. Are you really willing to risk another child's innocence and youth to keep certain organizations from teaching about STDs? Really? Or maybe it is the money issue. Are you willing to continue to allow the most vulnerable in our population be traumatized because you are worried about the cost, which private organizations have already offered to offset? Do you have any idea how ludicrous that is? It costs \$160 A WEEK for my child's counseling...and that is only one kid and the cost of one hour of time. What about the missed days of work on my part to work through this on my end and in support of him? What about the long-term effects this abuse may have on him? What about the long-term affects of childhood abuse on those kids that DON'T get counseling? Do you have any idea what the cost is to our state, and society in general, when we have a traumatized and abused youth on our hands? I am sure you are all well aware that we rank #1, or close to #1, in the COUNTRY for sexual abuse and sexual assault victims. I like winning as much as the next person, but that is one 'first place' I am not proud to be a part of. Our children need to feel safe. Our children need to know that they have resources outside of home to keep them safe. Our children need to hear often and loudly that their body is their body - and nobody else will be allowed to violate them.

This bill, and the health, safety and well-being of our children, are too important to be a parking lot for every issue regarding education. Do the right thing by passing House Bill 44 in its original format straight away. If you have any further questions for me or would like to meet in person, please feel free to contact me. I am passionate about this issue and want to do justice for our children.

Toni Roberts