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Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 216

Child abuse is a devastating epidemic that affects our most vulnerable Alaskans with lifelong trauma though most suffer in silence. Senate Bill 216 will help to empower our communities by educating children, parents and teachers and give them the opportunity to speak out. According to the Office of Children's Services, statistics show that in 2013 there were more than 2,000 allegations of child sexual abuse in Alaska, with more than 1800 individual victims, over 40% of who were Alaska Native children.

Senate Bill 216 also known as "Erin's Law" requires school districts to develop age-appropriate sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention from kindergarten through 12th grade. The bill is part of a national effort spearheaded by Erin Merryn. Erin, an advocate and sexual abuse survivor, has made it her mission to enact this legislation in all 50 states. Recently, she visited Juneau to promote this legislation and gave her powerful testimony in the House Education committee.

"Had someone taught me about safe touch, unsafe touch, safe secrets and unsafe secrets, I would have known it was safe to tell. Instead I lived my horror in silence. I am now on a mission to give children across the country the voice I never had as a child," said Merryn. To date versions of Erin's Law have been enacted in eight states and twenty-fives states, including Alaska have proposed versions of Erin's Law this year.

Under this bill, the curriculum for public schools will allow for enough flexibility so that each diverse region of Alaska can serve their communities in their own unique and most effective ways. Required curricula will include: warning signs of sexual abuse; referral and resource information; counseling and educational support; methods for increasing awareness of issues regarding sexual abuse of children; and actions a child may take to prevent and report sexual abuse or sexual assault.

I ask for your consideration and support of Erin's Law to give Alaskan's the tools to prevent and combat abuse. It is imperative that we send the important message that we value every child in our state and will do everything possible to protect them.