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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:** [Neal A. Patel](mailto:neal_patel@heller.senate.gov)/[Michawn Rich](mailto:michawn_rich@heller.senate.gov) | | June 26, 2015 | 202-224-6244 |   **Heller, Gillibrand, & Feinstein Introduce New Bipartisan Legislation to Help Protect Children from Sexual Abuse**  *The Child Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Act Would Help Fund ‘Erin’s Law’ Programs: Age-Appropriate Lessons for Students, Information for Parents and Guardians on Recognizing and Reporting Sexual Abuse in States Across Country*  **(Washington, DC)**– U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) today introduced bipartisan legislation to help protect children from sexual abuse by funding school programs that provide age-appropriate lessons to primary and secondary school students on how to recognize and safely report sexual abuse. Twenty-six states have passed a version of “Erin’s Law,” legislation that requires public schools to provide child sexual abuse prevention education to students and professional development for school personnel. Heller, Gillibrand, and Feinstein’s *Child Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Act* provides federal funding for schools to develop and implement or expand these programs for students, parents, and guardians. In 2013, there were a total of 60,956 instances of child sexual abuse reported to Child Protective Services agencies in the U.S. However, this estimate only represents cases of child sexual abuse reported to and confirmed by child protection authorities. Many such cases are never reported to welfare or legal systems.  “As a father of four children, I know parents want to protect their children and provide the safest possible learning environment for them,” said **Senator Heller.** “This legislation equips local school districts with the resources they need to develop or enhance child sexual abuse awareness and prevention efforts. Providing parents and children with the information to recognize child sexual abuse is a key weapon in stopping these heinous crimes. I’m proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation with my colleague, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, to ensure states, like Nevada, have the tools to help stop child sexual abuse.”  “Our children need to have an age-appropriate understanding of sexual abuse and know how to safely report to an adult if they have been victimized,” said **Senator Gillibrand**. “Erin’s Law is helping to fill an important gap in our prevention and awareness work, and the *Child Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Act* will make sure schools have the resources needed to develop or expand these programs and provide parents, guardians, and school personnel with the tools to help prevent and respond to child sexual abuse.”  “Sexual abuse can scar children for life and we must do everything we can to prevent it,” said **Senator Feinstein**. “Children are more likely to heal if abuse is detected early, which is why we must ensure they are taught what to do if they are being abused and school personnel are trained to spot the warning signs.”  "For five years I have been traveling from one state capital to another trying to pass Erin's law in my mission of all fifty states requiring that personal body safety be taught,” said **Erin Merryn, Erin’s Law Founder and President**. “The biggest hurdle I face in each state is Erin's law being an unfunded mandate. It is my biggest road block. With this bill passing it will play a significant role in Erin's law getting passed in the next 24 states. This funding will be an answer to my prayers in my biggest battle for Erin's law. Kids’ lives are waiting to be saved and we must educate them. I didn't have a voice but I am going to ensure every child in America has theirs.”  Twenty-six states across the country have passed a version of Erin’s Law, named after childhood sexual assault survivor and advocate Erin Merryn. Erin’s Law emphasizes the importance of educational programs that help prevent sexual abuse by using age-appropriate techniques to instruct children on how to recognize and report sexual abuse. Research has consistently shown that educational programs designed to prevent child sexual abuse are effective at teaching children skills to identify dangerous situations and prevent abuse. Such programs have also shown to be effective at promoting disclosure and reducing self-blame by victims. Two other critical aspects of Erin’s Law include professional development for school personnel and information for parents and guardians in how to recognize signs of child sexual abuse, talk to children about child sexual abuse, and how to respond when a child discloses sexual abuse.  The *Child Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Act* provides additional funding to advance Erin’s Law. Erin’s Law requires all public schools in states to implement prevention-oriented child sexual abuse programs. The programs established through the federal grants can be developed in partnership with community-based services and non-profit organizations with expertise in child sexual abuse prevention or response. The initiatives can be designed to include topics on how to recognize child sexual abuse, how to safely report child sexual abuse, and how to discuss child sexual abuse with children. Heller, Gillibrand, and Feinstein’s legislation serves as a complement to the *Helping Our Schools Protect Our Children Act,* allowing states and school districts to use federal grants to provide professional development to school personnel regarding how to recognize child sexual abuse. These personnel include: teachers, principals, specialized instructional support personnel, and paraprofessionals.  A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that 1 in 9 girls and 1 in 53 boys under the age of 18 experience sexual abuse or assault at the hands of an adult. The same study found that the total estimate of child sexual abuse was 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 20 boys; this estimate includes sexual abuse at the hands of juvenile perpetrators.  ###  [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_fb.png](http://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Senator-Dean-Heller/325751330177) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_tw.png](http://twitter.com/SenDeanHeller) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_yt.png](http://www.youtube.com/user/SenDeanHeller) |