

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse by Making Erin's Law Work for Kids

Hannah Swerbenski, PhD **Child sexual abuse (CSA)** is a widespread issue, affecting 1 in 5 people.¹ In New York, Child Protective Services substantiates over 2,000 cases of CSA every year,² although an estimated 23,000 cases go unreported each year in New York alone.^{3,4} CSA incurs significant societal cost, with an estimated lifetime economic burden of \$9.3 billion per year in the United States.⁵ Exposure to CSA is linked to debilitating lifelong consequences across mental, behavioral, and physical health domains.^{6,7,8}

Research Context



CSA differs from other forms of child abuse in that it involves secrecy^{9,10} and is difficult to detect.¹¹ CSA perpetrators are overwhelmingly known and trusted by the children they target.¹² Thus, CSA prevention requires a unique, multifaceted approach.^{13,14}

Prior deliberate attempts to lower community rates of CSA are rare and unsustainable, but new multi-sector approaches to primary prevention have been shown to reduce population rates of CSA, providing a \$14.31 return for every \$1 invested.¹⁵ Moreover, the school-based education component of these new prevention programs has been the most effective, with 97% of school districts participating.¹⁵ Yet, the most effective available strategy for CSA prevention remains underutilized due to lack of funding.

Policy Context

Erin's Law Could be the Solution for New York

We need a mechanism to facilitate school-based programming to prevent CSA. Erin's Law, which mandates CSA prevention education in schools, presents an opportunity to effectively fight CSA. Policy research from other states shows Erin's Law increases teacher reports of CSA¹⁶ and decreases substantiated cases of CSA,¹⁷ with bipartisan appeal.¹⁶ Yet, New York's version of Erin's Law has crucial limitations.

As written, Erin's Law allows some children to fall through the cracks.

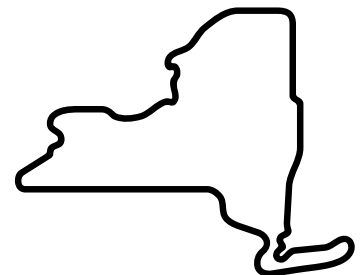
- New York is the only state that restricts Erin's Law to K-8. 36 other states require CSA prevention education through 12th grade. In New York, 30% of CSA victims are 13 or older,¹⁸ leaving teens unprotected.
- Over 10% of children in New York attend private schools,¹⁹ which have no mandate to provide CSA prevention education under Erin's Law.

Erin's Law provides no funding support to implement high quality programming.

- Funding can enable schools to offer higher quality programming delivered by trauma-informed professionals, but New York currently leaves federal programs like the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act's Stronger Connections program and CAPTA's Title II Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention program funds completely untapped.
- As a result, New York is falling behind other states that leverage federal funding to increase quality of CSA prevention programming, like Massachusetts and Delaware.

How can we make Erin's Law work better for kids in New York?

- ✓ **Expand Erin's Law to include children across all grade levels and schools**
- ✓ **Leverage available federal funding to support implementation of high quality, evidence-based CSA prevention programming**



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