

THE WV STATE TASK FORCE ON THE PREVENTION OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN



FINAL REPORT

Overview

At the urging of adult survivors of child sexual abuse, The State Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children (Task Force) was created in March 2015 upon the passage of WV House Bill 2527, or “**Erin Merryn’s Law,**” for the purpose of making recommendations on policies and practices to prevent child sexual abuse in West Virginia. Through extensive research and collaboration, the Task Force delivered a report to the Governor and WV Legislature in January 2018 with bold, yet attainable recommendations. **The report affirmed that it is the responsibility of adults to protect children from abuse and called on leaders to strengthen systems of support and training for people who work with children every day to prevent sexual abuse of children and to empower children through body safety education.**

After receiving the Task Force Report, lawmakers passed House Bill 4402 and Senate Bill 465 in 2018 to implement several of the Task Force recommendations. **HB 4402 strengthened professional development requirements for school personnel to prevent and respond to disclosures of child sexual abuse.** The bill also required schools to provide developmentally appropriate body safety information to all students in West Virginia beginning July 1, 2019. **SB 465 clarified requirements of mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect.**

The Task Force established five Action Groups to assist in the implementation of HB 4402 and SB 465, and the Task Force Report and Recommendations. The purpose of the Action Groups was to create resources for educating students in grades K-12, school personnel, teaching candidates, and youth-serving organizations to take effect in the 2019-20 school year.

Action Group Outcomes



K-12 Student Education Action Group

In close collaboration with the WV Department of Education, the K-12 Student Education Action Group brought together **content experts, teachers, administrators, and counselors throughout the state**, and a body safety education toolkit for grades K-12 was developed. Three sessions were held where **four age-appropriate lessons were developed for each grade level.** This toolkit offers teachers lesson plans and supplementary material on body safety education and child abuse prevention and is housed on the Department of Education and other partners’ websites. Hard copies outlining the toolkit were produced and distributed as well.

Supplemental materials were created including a **body safety poster** for elementary and middle schools and mirror clings for middle and high schools and provided for schools at several statewide trainings.

By law, children grades K-12 should receive body safety information one time minimally during each school year (with a preference for four times per academic year) with the intent to **embed sexual abuse prevention into the school climate.**



Policy Action Group

Though no new legislation has been introduced, there are recommendations put forth by the Task Force that still need addressed:

- Strengthen non-criminal **sanctions for offenders;**
- Continue to collaborate, leverage resources, and advocate for the **sustainability of child abuse prevention efforts;** and
- **Extend or eliminate statute of limitations** for civil actions regarding child sexual abuse.



Teacher Certification/Higher Education Action Group

Collaborated with WV State University to pilot teacher **preparation curriculum on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse.**

Evaluated pilot and made recommendations for disseminating program to other higher education institutions in the state.



Youth Service Organizations Action Group

Modified resource guides and information for youth-serving organizations to volunteer in **identifying inappropriate or boundary-violating behaviors** in their programs.



School Personnel Training Action Group

Worked with statewide partners to produce **educational tools** and **video training modules** to help WV teachers, school service personnel, youth-serving organizations, parents, and community members become more comfortable recognizing signs and symptoms of abuse and knowing how to respond. Three comprehensive training modules totaling four hours of education were produced and published online to facilitate individual or group training.

Resource guides were produced to help administrators conduct the training.

Supplementary materials were produced and distributed to educators and organizations working with youth that complimented the toolkit and video modules, including **child abuse hotline magnets** and a **quick-guide for signs of child abuse and how to respond.**

- By law, all school service personnel must complete **four hours of training** on recognition and response to child abuse. **Skills renewal is required every two years thereafter.**

Looking Forward

West Virginia students in grades K-12 and school service personnel across the state will have quality resources to identify and prevent child sexual abuse each and every year. **The impact on the lives of child abuse survivors hearing this information for the first time in a classroom setting is unquantifiable.** By educating those on the front lines working with these children every day, **child abuse symptoms will be recognized and responded to more quickly and through the proper channels.** This prevention message will be paramount in the lives of current and future WV kids.

The Task Force partners will continue to support the creation of a state plan outlining victim services and coordinated prevention efforts, funding for child abuse prevention at the local level, and continue to build legislative support for recommendations.

The Task Force partners will continue to support the WV Department of Education’s efforts in **local support of body safety education** implementation and **school service personnel training**, support institutions of higher education in **preparing future educators to identify and respond to child abuse**, and continue **training mandatory reporters.**



The Task Force would like to express our sincere appreciation to each member and each participating stakeholder for their commitment to this process and for their unwavering passion for protecting all of our children.

WV Association of Elementary and Middle School Principals

WV Child Advocacy Network

WV Department of Health and Human Resources

WV House of Delegates Education Committee

WV Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers

WV Foundation for Rape Information and Services

WV Senate Education Committee

Prevent Child Abuse-WV / TEAM for West Virginia Children

WV Department of Education

WV Coalition Against Domestic Violence

WV FREE

Step by Step, Inc.

WV State University

84 Agency

Content experts and educators throughout the state

The Task Force extends its appreciation for the generous support from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation that enabled the facilitation and convening of the Task Force and the implementation of child abuse prevention education outlined in this report.

To support continued child abuse prevention efforts statewide, contact info@wvcan.org.

To report suspected child abuse, call: 1-800-352-6513.

Prepared by the West Virginia Child Advocacy Network



www.wvcan.org