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CINDY HOLSCHER  
SENATOR 8TH DISTRICT

Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the critical issue of mandatory reporting requirements for clergy members.

As a long time advocate for survivors of sexual abuse, I stand before you today in support of HB 2300 which would compel clergy members to report instances of suspected child abuse or neglect. This is a matter of utmost importance, as it directly impacts the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable citizens.

Clergy members often serve as trusted confidants and advisors within their communities. Their positions of authority and influence give them unique access to individuals who may be experiencing abuse or neglect, particularly children. However, without mandatory reporting laws in place, clergy members may find themselves in a morally conflicted position, torn between their duty to protect the vulnerable and their obligations to maintain confidentiality within their religious institutions.

Also consider the following:

-Per a recent report by the Gunderson National Child Protection Training Center, 93% of convicted sex offenders consider themselves religious. Including clergy as mandated reporters helps "close a gap" in an area where predators are likely to be victimizing children

-The current list of mandatory reporters is quite extensive including teachers, medical professionals, counselors and even firefighters. A number of children in our state are home-schooled and have a lower likelihood of interacting with current mandatory reporters. However, many home-schooled children attend church; including clergy as mandatory reporters would help ensure more vulnerable children receive the support they need.

By mandating that clergy members report suspected cases of abuse or neglect, we can ensure that victims receive the support and intervention they desperately need. Early intervention is critical in preventing further harm to other potential victims and facilitating healing for survivors. Moreover, mandatory reporting laws would reinforce the societal expectation that **everyone** has a responsibility to protect children from harm.

I understand that some may have concerns about the potential impact of mandatory reporting laws on religious freedoms and the confidentiality of spiritual counseling sessions. However, it is essential to recognize that **the safety and well-being of children must always take precedence**. Mandatory reporting laws can be crafted in a way that respects religious beliefs and practices while still prioritizing the protection of vulnerable individuals.

In conclusion, I urge this esteemed committee to support the implementation of mandatory reporting requirements for clergy members. By doing so, we can take a significant step forward in our collective efforts to prevent and address child abuse and neglect in our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I am available to provide any further information or clarification you may require.

Respectfully,

Sen. Cindy Holscher