

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Kelly Noonan Murphy and Honorable Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

I am testifying in support of LD 2192, as a feminist sociologist and long time educator.

Several years ago I participated in a "Know Your Rights under Title IX" training for Maine high school students (who chose to attend). As we were discussing examples of sexual harassment in school, a student haltingly shared a story of being required to squat into the hand of her P.E. teacher, who would then squeeze her vulva. Other students nervously giggled and nodded - this was not unique to her. When we talked about reporting, they laughed it off, saying he was "just creepy" but not dangerous. They noted that they were afraid of retaliation in athletics if they made a scene. While in this situation we were able to connect them with the Title IX coordinator for their district, I think about these students often. How had 15 year olds already absorbed the message that being groped by an adult was the price of admission to public education?

Almost 10 years ago, the Federal Government documented a crisis of sexual harassment and abuse in K-12 schools in the United States, finding that almost 10% of children directly experience "adult sexual misconduct" in school and countless more experience the indirect impacts. A 2024 [book](#) raises that estimate to 17% of students.

"While definitions of ASM vary from state to state, a [report](#) by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) defines ASM as any sexual activity directed to a child with the purpose of developing a romantic or sexual relationship. Behaviors may range from those that are inappropriate to those that are illegal, and they may include verbal conduct, physical conduct, or electronic interactions. ASM can be perpetrated by educators but also by other school personnel, including athletic coaches, administrative staff, bus drivers, or volunteers." <https://rems.ed.gov/ASM>

The report goes on to encourage school districts to do more to prevent “aiding and abetting” of perpetrators. **LD 2192 is a clear example of an intervention to a well documented problem.** I urge you to pass this bill and to go further and commit resources to research the extent of this problem in Maine Schools.

In 2025, the [Maine Youth Health Integrated Study](#) found that **9.8%** of female respondents and **6.3%** of male respondents in High School missed at least one day of school in the previous 30 days, because they were afraid to attend. **21.1%** of High School aged female respondents answered “yes” to lifetime forced sexual contact, compared to **6.4%** of male respondents. (There is not a question about who perpetrated the abuse.) Notably, **40.0%** of transgender identifying respondents answered “yes,” compared to **12%** of respondents who identified as not transgender. When we think about protecting Maine girls, these statistics should be significant drivers of the actions we take.

While research on offenders of ASM in schools is slim, a [2017 report](#) summarizes these characteristics:

Contrary to common conception, school employee sexual misconduct offenders are typically popular and they often have been recognized for excellence.

Offenders include all types of school employees, such as teachers, school psychologists, coaches, principals, and superintendents. Offenders are most frequently male.. Beyond these general statistics, very little is known about offenders’ characteristics, as they span all ages, ethnicities, and income levels.

Ironically, the same characteristics of teacher-student relationships that help create a successful educational environment can also create a potentially exploitative situation. Research has shown that school employees whose jobs include individual, isolated, or alone time with students (such as music teachers, coaches, and counselors) are more likely to engage in sexual misconduct. Close contact with students, who are often eager to please their teachers, allows

offenders the opportunity to “groom”⁴ students for eventual misconduct, by giving special attention and rewards while slowly increasing the amount of touching or other sexual behaviors. In this way, offenders exploit students’ need to please and take advantage of the power they have over grades, discipline, playing time, and other rewards students may covet. **One teacher offender can have as many as 73 victims**, according to a 2010 GAO report.

This is important because we know that while a logic of “bad apples” does not explain the systemic and ongoing crisis of sexual abuse in our society, it is not that most people are perpetrators of sexual misconduct, but rather that most of us look away and create a permission structure for a small number of people to do a large amount of harm. This has been termed [Institutional Betrayal](#) by social psychologist Jennifer Freyd and she offers guidelines for [Institutional Courage](#) as a collective remedy. That is, if we do not successfully prevent abuse, we can intervene and respond with much more care and commitment than we currently do, which will help us prevent future misconduct. We are clearly seeing this in the Epstein crisis which has significant lessons for all of us).

As a faculty member in the University of Maine system, I hear many stories from many Maine students about their experiences with sexism and sexual harassment and assault in their K-12 schools. However, fear of reporting abuse by a teacher or other trusted adult is significant and this is not an open topic of conversation for most of us. We simply cannot wait for individuals to disclose child sexual abuse as a pathway for addressing this problem. Trust the [research](#) and take every step offered to prevent future harassment - in this case the relatively simple step of requiring disclosures as part of a hiring process and preventing the misuse of NDAs. Pass LD 2192.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Simmons, PhD

(Please note, I am testifying on my own behalf, and not as a representative of my employer, the University of Southern Maine.)