

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Kirstan Watson, I'm a resident of Arundel, and I'm here today in support of L.D. 2192.

I want to be fully transparent on the record that as a member of the RSU 21 School Board of Directors, I am not authorized to speak on behalf of the board, nor am I here to speak in my capacity as director.

Today, I stand before you as a survivor.

I don't speak on behalf of survivors; I am just one voice.

But I **am** one.

I endured things as a child; no child should have to endure. For years, the behavior inflicted kept me quiet and paralyzed—small and vulnerable, I was powerless. Easy prey in an environment loyal to the comfort of avoidance, disclosure was met with suspicion and denial. Afraid and confused I was left alone to bear the pain of things I wasn't yet equipped to understand.

I want to be clear, none of this happened at school. In fact, school was my respite and what helped me survive. It was the videos I watched in classrooms, from kindergarten, through second grade, that taught me these secrets weren't meant to be kept. Too embarrassed and ashamed to approach an adult, I told a classmate, who told a teacher who told a nurse who called my mom. And it was ultimately those closest who were meant to protect me, who betrayed me in choosing cowardice over courage.

My heart breaks knowing my story isn't rare, even in communities like ours, even in rooms like this. *Statistically, 1 in 2 women and 1 in 3 men, will experience sexual trauma in their lifetime. If an unshakeable truth remains with you from today, know that it wasn't the initial assaults on my body then my mind, but the silence of adults choosing avoidance over accountability, and systems that allow harm to hide in plain sight.

L.D. 2192 powerfully confronts systemic silence by first, requiring the conversation we're having now. While it may not be easy, I can say with conviction, that the cost of silence is greater than any of us can afford.

This bill requires investigations begin when serious allegations arise; that those investigations be completed, even if the accused resigns; and most critically, it shifts information-sharing between districts from optional to mandatory, reducing legal uncertainty that historically allow patterns of harm to remain unseen, by discouraging full disclosure.

We cannot eliminate every risk, but we **can** dismantle systems that enable silence and strengthen those dedicated to accountability. L.D. 2192 is about the courage to prioritize prevention by ensuring that the adults entrusted with the well-being of children and one another, are equipped with the necessary tools and obligation to act when something is wrong.

On a deeply personal level, I want to thank those with the courage required of this moment, who envision a future that prioritizes prevention over fear. Giving voice to the pain of being silenced is a gift I can't fully repay. I thank you for doing this incredibly challenging and necessary work.

*National Sexual Violence Research Center