

Senator Rafferty

Representative Brennan

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, distinguished members of the committee, my name is Kelly Colbath and I am writing to urge you to support LD 254: An Act to Update the Sex Education & Consent Curriculum.

I have worked with kids and young adults for the past 5 years of my life. ACCURATE, accessible, and inclusive sex ed matters to me and should matter to everyone because I see the consequences first-hand among those who have not had access to it. I work with young people who are at high-risk and are exposing themselves to STIs, unplanned pregnancy, sexual assault, exploitation, and much more. The majority of these young people do not know where to go or what to do with these risks. Every day, I see young people becoming pregnant and not knowing what to do next or not even knowing the symptoms. I see young people getting STIs and not wanting to disclose symptoms due to the stigma around being "dirty".

Accurate, relevant, accessible, and inclusive sex ed matters to me because more information keeps our kids safer. Addressing stigma and misconceptions keeps our kids informed. Providing open discussions about local resources and where to go for help keeps our kids/young people prepared. I wish I had access to more accurate and comprehensive sex ed when I was in school because I would not have been put in as many risky/unsafe situations as I was, I would not have spent so much time scared, wondering what was wrong with my body, and I would have felt more supported or known where to go to get more support.

My sex ed was incredibly minimal. It was primarily binary, split between boys and girls where we mainly discussed the introductory components of puberty. For one or two classes, we would discuss how girls get pregnant and how to use a condom and briefly talking about STIs. However, that was it. No one taught us where to go if we do think we have an STI, if we are pregnant, what our options are, etc., and nothing was every talked about regarding consent. I was well into my early adulthood before I was exposed to conversations that went into detail about consent, personal rights, and resources. I always

felt that the topics were presented as forced and uncomfortable. The environment never really felt open to questions. I still went about life putting myself at risk to figure things out on my own because it never felt appropriate to ask questions. I did a lot of learning on my own, even the hard way.

My sex ed experience could have been made better with: improved and more accurate information, more extensive learning, and a more comfortable environment. I wish I had a teacher who presented to be more comfortable and open with what we were being taught because maybe I would have felt more confident asking questions or maybe more information would have been taught so that questions my friends and I had would be answered in the classroom. I think we needed much more time dedicated to consent. Aside from the occasional "stranger danger" lesson, we were never taught the rights we have to our own bodies and what to do and where to go if those are being violated. We needed more information about bodily development beyond the introductory components of puberty (body hair, periods, hygiene). We should have been taught more about what our bodies may do if we are exposed to an STI or if we do accidentally become pregnant. We should have been taught more about what is normal and what isn't within our own bodies and in our genitals so that my friends and I didn't turn to the internet to be misinformed about bodily functions that were actually normal and healthy. We should have been taught more about the act of sex and consent; how to have consent conversations with our partners, how to agree on protection, how to identify unhealthy behaviors from a partner, where to go if we do not feel safe, and addressing the misconceptions taught to us about sex and the risks presented by the media and societal stigmas.

If everyone had access to high quality sex education, our world would look safer. Our world would look more educated and informed and with more knowledge comes informed consent and informed decision making. Informed decision making leads to less risky behaviors or unhealthy decisions. I think most young people make risky decisions about their bodies and sexual health because they have not been taught the skills to know otherwise. With high quality sex education, our world could look safer, healthier, and more supportive.

Please vote "ought to pass" on LD 254: An Act to Update the Sex Education & Consent Curriculum. Thank you for your time.

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