

March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Dear Chair Williamson, Vice Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger and members of the House Judiciary Committee.

My name is Jessica Le, I work at Clackamas Women's Services as a violence prevention educator. I have worked with college students as a peer educator during my time at Portland State University, now I currently serve Clackamas County working with middle school and high school students, talking about various different types of violence in hopes of preventing it from occurring in the first place. There are lots of different reasons why folks pursue this line of work, for me, it is my passion to advocate for vulnerable populations through education and wanting to prevent this from happening to others because I, myself, am a statistic. I am a survivor of sexual assault and a victim of childhood sexual abuse.

My story isn't unique. What happened to me is something that is quite common, but as I have learned, just because something is common does not mean that it's healthy and ok. We've heard the statistics of sexual violence, but let's hear them again. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center released statistics in 2010 reporting that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives. For children, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused before turning 18 years old. 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to law enforcement, making rape the most under reported crime. There are lots of reasons why people don't disclose about experiencing sexual assault or sexual misconduct, for me, it was because I didn't know nor had the language to articulate that what happened to me is defined as sexual violence and abuse.

My job as an educator is to raise awareness to harmful behaviors so we don't contribute to the violence ourselves, as well as practicing skills to intervene safely and speaking up for others. As a community if we remain silent when violence occurs we are conveying a message to the victim that we are ok with what's going on. Some reasons why folks do not disclose about experiencing sexual violence is due to fear of not being believed, or fear of being blamed for what happened to them.

I ask students a question that's kind of silly and I acknowledge it's silly, but I ask them to please raise their hand if they consider themselves to be someone's family member or friend. If you raised your hand that means that you are more likely to hear about sexual assault occurring rather than law enforcement. We know the prevalence of how often sexual abuse occurs, so we are bound to have someone tell us about experiencing this; therefore it's paramount to teach skills on how to advocate for our peers and necessary to know how to respond in a kind and empathetic way. I ask students to brainstorm ways to support a victim, that when all else fails, if we don't know what to do or what to say it never hurts to go with "I'm sorry that happened to you. I believe you and it's not your fault."

I have had students realize and feel validation that the harm they experienced was not their fault and that they are not alone. Being in the classroom, interacting with so many different students and talking about these issues that so many folks shy away from, I have been able to help youth get connected with resources, seek help and feel support from their community. Something that may not have been feasible or within their realm of knowledge due to collective silence in regards of the topic of sexual violence. On the flip side, I have also had students realize that they have been the abuser and want to change. Findings from the NYCTDV Prevention Experiment released statistics stating that 64% of students are less likely to commit sexual violence after participating in violence prevention education. There is a clear need and demand for our services, but with the current resources available or lack

thereof, we have had to turn schools away, meaning hundreds of youth being underserved solely due to lack of funding.

I recently facilitated a lesson about dating violence a student approached me after class and asked, "How do I go about apologizing now that I've fully realized that I'm the abusive partner?" Not only do we identify red flags and harmful behaviors, but students are given the space to learn about healthy relationships, safe dating, practice nonviolent communication and discuss the nuances of consent. More funding could mean more students learning fundamental life skills that will set them up for success to flourish and thrive in any kind of interpersonal relationship.

What encompasses violence prevention? Advocacy, education, and legislation. Sexual violence impacts all of us directly and indirectly. We can advocate and educate, but there's just so much we can do on an individual level. It's necessary to get the support from legislation. I was silent about what happened to me because of the prevalence in which sexual violence occurs, I assumed that this is just the way things are. As a community if we remain silent when violence occurs, knowing how prevalent, knowing the predictor variables, knowing that there are preventative measures that we can utilize but choose not to; by remaining silent we are reinforcing an environment created for sexual violence to thrive and pervade. By remaining inactive we are conveying messages to all those impacted by sexual violence that we're ok with what's going on, or that we don't care enough to do anything about it. I'm here to ask you to believe in your community and show your commitment towards social change by passing this bill. Violence is prevalent. Violence is predictable. Violence is preventable.

Sincerely, Jessica Le