

2/1/2023
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Re: Support Senate Bill 605

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Maya Raphael and I live in Portland, Oregon. I am a senior at La Salle College Prep and I am a leader of the Youth Interpersonal Violence Prevention Coalition. As one of the three high school students who crafted and campaigned for this bill, I am in full support of it.

Teen sexting is a highly taboo subject; its existence is often denounced, shamed, or entirely disregarded — none of which are productive responses to the complex yet frequent occurrence of distributing sexually explicit material. As a teen, I understand the ubiquity of teen sexting. Ample of my peers have engaged in it and usually, it occurs in a consensual, experimental, and healthy manner. But, in my experience, many adults have trouble conceptualizing how healthy development can overlap with sexting.

In the context of our digital era, consensual sexting is a standard aspect of psychosexual development; the formation of sexual identity, the desire to make oneself appealing to others, and the navigation of intimacy are all recognized parts of the adolescent experience. As the number of youth with technology access increases, the ways that sexuality is expressed will undeniably change. We cannot resist this change, for if we do, our denial will deter the protection of youth.

By creating an affirmative defense for teen sexting, we are not condoning nor encouraging it; we are evolving with the times, creating legislation that accurately reflects our reality. We are evolving to understand the normality of teen sexting, and creating a pathway for teens to seek help after they have engaged in sexting, without facing legal consequences — say perhaps getting law enforcement involved after being coerced and having explicit images leaked.

In this case, when boundaries have clearly been crossed, the perpetrator will face consequences and the victim will be protected — rather than a one-size-fits-all punishment. Teens should feel safe reporting these instances, knowing they will not be subject to a felony charge when simply attempting to protect themselves. They should not feel as though their justice is at odds with our legal system.

I wholeheartedly persuade you to think about teen sexting holistically, and how our bill will prevent sexual violence and bolster protection for youth. The benefits, small and big, will be boundless. With this in mind, I strongly encourage you to pass Senate Bill 605.

Sincerely,

Maya Raphael
Youth Interpersonal Violence Prevention

