

HB342

Education - Health and Safety of Students Notification of Problematic Student Behavior

**** SUPPORT ****

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Written testimony respectfully submitted by

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Adults in Maryland (from our schools, therapists offices, Child Advocacy Centers, Child Protective Services, Police and Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, Parents) are all seeing an increase in youth with problematic sexual behaviors. This trend is present nationwide with experts worrying, in this year of children being out of school due to COVID, with increased isolation and increased screen time, there is / will be an even larger increase in the already high numbers of children experiencing this issue.

This is perplexing and alarming as adults are not sure what is driving this tremendous increase. Is it the over accessibility of violent pornography that even our youngest children are watching? Is it the dramatic increase in even small children being on social media constantly? As more data and research is gathered and conducted one thing is sure. All parents must be aware of this issue, educating themselves and their children regarding appropriate boundaries and

behaviors. They must guide their children in topics regarding consent, pornography and relationships.

While it is important all parents must have this knowledge, for some parents it is critical. Parents whose children have either acted out sexually in a problematic way and / or parents whose children have been acted upon are in urgent need of this information. The research on why more children are acting out is not clear yet. The research on children who act out sexually and children who are victimized is very, very clear. For both sets of children, early intervention is critical and highly effective. For children acting out, they can learn to control their behaviors and end them, preventing future acting out. For victims, they can learn the actions were not their fault, learn boundaries and other skills and thus prevent the often long term devastation that childhood sexual abuse often causes. Everyone agrees on this.

Parents cannot however act upon what they do not know. Far too often, when children with sexual behavior problems act out in schools, the parents of the children are not told. Parents cannot help their children unless they know there is a problem. It's as simple as that.

This bill is simple, basic and powerful. Parents must be notified within 24 hours of schools becoming aware of problematic sexual behaviors. Easy. Without this information parents cannot act to help their children and the problems will get worse when they could be corrected more quickly.

For those reasons I urge a favorable report on this bill.

Thank you.