

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1005

Education – Health and Safety of Students – Notification of Problematic Sexual Behavior **SUPPORT**

TO: Hon. Anne R. Kaiser, Chair, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Rowan Powell

DATE: January 20, 2021

My name is Rowan Powell, and I am providing personal testimony in support of Bill HB 342 and as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

In 2007 I was repeatedly sexually abused by a classmate of mine. We went to all of the same classes and spent a good deal of time together in school. There was escalating abusive behavior throughout that year.

It started with simple demeaning comments. He called every idea I had in class stupid, and reinforced that within conversations among classmates, often stating that I was worthless. He told peers that he had chosen to partner with me on projects because I was incapable of doing the work by myself. It moved from this verbal bullying to threats of violence, and then finally to actual violence. Early on, a teacher saw him punch me in the chest. She scolded him for flirting with me at school, helped me up and as I tried to regain my breath, told me that he just liked me a lot and that boys didn't know how to express their feelings correctly.

After months of this escalating violence he raped me multiple times, several of which occurred in the school building. Afterwards my behavior changed dramatically. I stopped being a straight A student. I became withdrawn, depressed, and cut off from those I was close to. I was in the nurse's office at least 3 times a week, complaining of headaches and stomachaches. Eventually I was pulled into a guidance counselor's office due to my inability to focus or participate in class, and I disclosed to her what had been happening. I described it in the best way that I could as a child, that he had been hurting me and touching me in places that I didn't want to be touched. She kindly explained to me that what he had been doing to me was what boys did when they liked girls, and that perhaps I was overreacting.

There were so many opportunities for intervention by an adult in my story. There was no notification of my parents and no steps were taken to address any of the problems occurring. In hindsight, I believe that the inaction by my school administration had a lot to do with the fact that it is hard for adults to even talk about the fact that children have sex, let alone that sometimes sex between minors is not experimentation, but can be harmful and abusive. My teacher and guidance counselor both had the chance to address the problematic behavior that I had brought to their attention, but because they couldn't wrap their heads around the idea

that a teenage boy as young as 13 could be harming someone else, it was dismissed and explained away as normative behavior.

I understand that sexual predation in minors is often a result of trauma they have themselves been a victim of, and that drawing clear lines between perpetrators and victims at such a young age is not cut and dry. However, when schools are the setting in which such problematic sexual behavior occurs, they must at the very least take responsibility for informing parents and guardians. I would personally like to see schools go a step further and facilitate appropriate referrals for intervention to happen in the community for both children involved. If the school had notified my mother and supported her through the process of identifying services for me in the community, I might not have later become an adult public health statistic. I've lived with depression, anxiety and severe PTSD because of this for most of my life and I continue to use behavioral health services to this day.

Statically childhood sexual abuse affects 1 out of 10 children, and that is a low estimate given that most children who are sexually assaulted or abused do not report the crime. This leads to further somatic and behavioral health complications in that child's life and into adulthood. It is imperative that we prepare adults, especially teachers and school administrators to intercept the cycle of trauma.

Thank you for reading this, please support HB 342.