

Testimony Supporting House Bill 412

Anna Dzekunov

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Hello,

I am a student at Montgomery College in Rockville. I have lived in Maryland my entire life and am proud of my state. Since I love where I live, I believe that positive change in our legislature is not just possible but necessary.

House Bill 412 would change Maryland's rape law to focus on whether there is clear and voluntary agreement between the people involved. The definition of consent proposed includes:

- Clear and voluntary agreement
- The right to withdraw consent
- Communication through words or conduct

• Consent is not:

- o what someone is wearing,
 - o a prior relationship, or
 - o as a result of fear, threat, or coercion
- Documentation is not required

I was honestly disappointed but not surprised when I learned that Maryland law requires more than a lack of consent to prove rape. Disappointed because this is clearly wrong, but not surprised because, in terms of sexual assault and justice, many places in the country have a long way to go. I want Maryland to lead a trend towards real justice for rape victims everywhere. If we can agree that emotional, psychological, and financial abuse are just as real and as harmful as physical abuse, then we can agree that coercion, pressure, or fear can be as weighty as the immediate threat of physical harm. Sexual assaults are rarely reported and even more rarely result in criminal conviction not because they are rare, but because they are so difficult to prosecute. Rape more often happens within the bounds of a relationship than from a "stranger in the shadows", but the state seems to disregard this fact. I can speak personally to the fact that even just one moment of sexual activity without consent can take years of therapy to begin to address. This does real harm to many, so the state must treat it seriously.

I, Anna Dzekunov, urge the Judiciary Committee to report favorably on House Bill 412.