



SIECUS Written Testimony for MD House Bill 194

Serving as one of the national voices for sex education for over 55 years, SIECUS asserts that sexuality is a fundamental part of being human, one worthy of dignity and respect. Over [three decades of research](#) have shown that sex education is the most effective in reducing health disparities such as unplanned pregnancy and improves young people's social and emotional well-being. Through the introduction of House Bill 194, the Maryland Legislature has a key opportunity to advance the quality of instruction young people receive statewide. If enacted, House Bill 194 will ensure that all young people in Maryland receive age-appropriate instruction on the risks of sexting as part of the Family Life and Human Sexuality curriculum.

It's essential that the Maryland Senate pass this critical legislation to guarantee all young people, regardless of their zip code, receive the instruction they need to make healthy and safe decisions about their digital presence. In 2019, approximately 14% of young people nationwide sent a sext and 23% received one.¹ Despite this prevalence, many young people don't realize that sexting is illegal for minors and the potential danger it poses. Young people across Maryland are currently receiving inconsistent instruction on media literacy due to the lack of a statewide mandate, and the passage of this pivotal legislation will ensure all students are informed of the legal ramifications of sexting.

Media safety is paramount in ensuring young people have the tools they need to thrive throughout their entire lives. To effectively improve the quality of the Family Life and Human Sexuality curriculum for all young people in Maryland, it is critical that sex education programming includes robust, age appropriate instruction on sexting through the passage of House Bill 194. SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change calls on the Maryland Senate to take swift action to pass this legislation to improve the quality of education for all Maryland youth.

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1054139X19305099?via%3Dihub>