



BILL NUMBER: HB194

TITLE: Education – Family Life and Human Sexuality Curriculum – Sexting

COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee

HEARING DATE: January 27, 2022

POSITION: Support

TurnAround, Inc. respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 194. This bill would not only prevent the potential criminalization of youth across Maryland; it could also serve an instrumental role in advancing preventive, interventive, and restorative education and training measures to young people in this state every day. TurnAround’s mission is to educate, advocate for, and empower all people impacted by issues of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking. We recognize that sexual violence is a serious problem that has lasting, harmful effects on victims and their family, friends, and communities they belong to.

In order to prevent sexual violence, we must understand and address risk and protective factors at the individual, relational, community, and societal levels. Per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, risk factors are linked to a greater likelihood of sexual violence perpetration and victimization, though not everyone who is identified as at risk becomes a perpetrator of violence. House Bill 194 will require age-appropriate instruction on the risks of sexting as part of the Family Life and Human Sexuality curriculum. This is an important step in opening up dialog with young people in Maryland about boundaries and the risks of sharing sexually explicit material in this way. It is also responsive to modern methods of communication, recognizing that technology is being used to facilitate sexual activity. It is necessary to evolve our curriculum to cover education and dialog with students about the potential of sexting to contribute to individual risk factors such as early sexual initiation, prospective sexual abuse, and exposure to sexually explicit media.

Over the last decade, TurnAround’s Community Engagement and Training Manager has entered the schools of Baltimore City and County, spending more hours with young people providing preventive education than her own home, discussing everything from how to keep one’s body safe from the very people who we teach young people to trust to how to spot red flags in a potentially abusive relationship. Approximately 30% of TurnAround’s client population is under the age of 25; with 18% between the ages of 18-24, 8% between the ages of 13-17, and roughly 4% ages 12 or younger. COVID-19 presents unique obstacles for young survivors because of disruption to their learning schedule or environments and greater reliance on technology to stay connected.

Some may worry that our children are too young for such a topic as sexting. While this concern is understandable, children and youth are already talking about these issues and having experiences that could impact them long into adulthood. We have been invited into a school because almost the entire 7th grade is having some of their first sexual experiences in the bathroom. Students from young preschool age to those on the verge of their college years often tear up during conversations about abuse. These are critical topics to address and can be handled in an age-appropriate manner to help students better understand and mitigate the risks of this behavior.

