



BILL NO: House Bill 194
TITLE: Education - Family Life and Human Sexuality Curriculum - Sexting
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
HEARING DATE: January 27, 2022
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the House Ways and Means Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 194.**

House Bill 194 requires age-appropriate instruction on the risks of sexting as part of the Family Life and Human Sexuality curriculum in every grade in which the curriculum is taught in public schools in the county, beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence is deeply concerned about the connection between sexting and teen dating violence. The use of coercion in sexting among children has been identified as an indicator of other forms of coercion that occur offline.¹ In one survey of youth who reported at least one dating or sexual partner in the past 12 months, 12% reported coercive sexting victimization and 8% acknowledged pressuring a partner to sext.² Other studies have identified a connection between victims who are coerced into sexting also being victimized by other forms of teen dating violence, including sexual, physical and emotional abuse.³

The Maryland General Assembly passed crucial legislation last year that defined sexting, established it as a mitigating factor in a proceeding and disposition, and precluded sex offender registration if found guilty of sexting. The use of cell phones and other forms of technology is ubiquitous in our society and utilized by children at very young ages. While sexting can be part of a healthy, consensual relationship; it can also be used in a harmful, abusive, and exploitive manner. Education at very young ages in an age-appropriate manner regarding sexting is important for the healthy development of Maryland's children.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report on HB 194.**