

I, Stacey Bishop, would like to testify favorably on [HB194](#), Delegate Shetty's bill about sexting education. As a Family Life and Human Sexuality educator in Washington County, I feel it would benefit our students to receive 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 my 15 years working with middle school students, I have found they are very misinformed of the consequences around sexting. Some have received sexts, sent sexts, or have been asked to send sexts. To keep our students safe, we need to empower them with knowledge. It is all our responsibility to ensure they receive accurate, fact-based, age-appropriate information; and this needs to happen before entering middle school. Thanks to COVID, all students now have access to tablets, phones and social media in elementary school. Along with the substantial opportunities the digital age brings, come a diverse range of risks and harms, which can have real-world implications. Equipping our students with the skills to effectively navigate the digital environment can help them understand the digital risks, dangers, and consequences they face. If we don't do this now, we are putting a target on their back. We are contributing to their exposure, vulnerability, and misuse.....which leads to a whole other plethora of issues.

I recently implemented the Positive Prevention Plus curriculum to 9<sup>th</sup> grade High School health classes. During one of the sessions (on Relationship Abuse) we did an activity called the Wheel of Power and Control. Cards labeled with different categories of abuse were posted on the wall. This interactive group activity started a conversation about sexting and the laws around sexting. Sadly, they have received very little, if any information on this topic. A topic that most of them have been dealing with in one form or another since middle school or younger.

In my experience, sexting has become normalized for many teens, and most do not think it comes with any consequences. For students to become ethical digital citizens we need to build their capacity to safely navigate the digital world. Incorporating this information into Family Life curriculum will play an important role in promoting digital responsibility and improve students' safety in the digital environment. It is our responsibility to keep our kids safe and that starts with empowering them with age-appropriate information at an early age.