



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 194**

**Education - Family Life and Human Sexuality Curriculum - Sexting  
Statement in SUPPORT**

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington and Members of the Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony in support of House Bill 194, which will require local boards of education to provide 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 being taught in public schools in the county, beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.

HB194 is part two of the legislature's effort to address sexting among young people, an issue that was first addressed by a bill from my committee and passed by this chamber last session. The Judiciary Committee's bill last session, led by my Chairman, corrected our criminal code to ensure that young people who engage in consensual sexting activity are not sent to jail unnecessarily. Instead, the law now allows judges to order young people who are caught engaged in the consensual sending or receiving of these images to participate in an educational program designed to teach them the potential long-lasting and permanent harms of this behavior. However, all stakeholders we worked with, many of whom are here today to testify in support of this bill, realized that if a young person is first learning about these harms via a judge-ordered program, then it is likely too late.

Thus, before you today is HB194, which will require local school systems to implement age-appropriate education about sexting. Currently, children are learning about consent, technology, abuse, and technology safety; however, there is no curriculum focused on the potential danger and emotional impacts of sexting. Children have increasing access to cell phones, tablets, and social media at a younger age. Given this increased access, it is imperative that we do not shy away from educating young people about the dangers they might put themselves in.

Published studies on youth sexting cite that between 1.3 - 60% of children have or are currently sending or receiving sexts.<sup>1</sup> However, this number is likely far under-reported. Last year, when we were working through the Chairman's bill on this issue in the Judiciary Committee, the

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<sup>1</sup> JAMA Pediatrics, "Prevalence of Multiple Forms of Sexting Behavior Among Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta Analysis": <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2673719>

House pages took an interest in the bill. They reported to me that they had conducted an informal poll amongst themselves and found that 100% of them were currently engaged in sexting behaviors. One study published in the journal JAMA Pediatrics, which included data from 39 separate research projects conducted from January 1990 to June 2016, found that one in four young people had received a sext and one in seven had sent a sext.<sup>1</sup> The researchers noted that data shows an increase in sexting since 2008, corresponding with the expanding access to cell phones. It is also important to note that social media usage has only increased since the conclusion of that study in 2016. With a total of 110,380 participants in the study, the average child in the study was 10.3 years old when they got their first smartphone.

There are different forms of sexting: consensual, which was addressed via the law last session; coercive; and the republication of a sext. These are each distinctly different, and coerced or republished sexts are unprotected activities that can result in serious criminal consequences as well as permanent harm to kids. HB194 seeks to educate young people on this issue and would ensure that children fully understand the choices that they are making behind their screens.

**Thank you for your consideration, and I respectfully request a favorable report on HB194.  
Thank you.**