

Testimony Supporting House Bill 496  
Morgan State University Peer Educators.  
1700 E Cold Spring Ln, Baltimore, MD 21251

February 13, 2024

The Peer Education Program is a student led organization at Morgan State University under the Morgan State University Counseling Center. The Peer Education Program was created to promote education to Morgan State University Students regarding sexual health, responsible relationships and sexual violence. The Peer Education Program provides an opportunity for students to promote responsible sexual health, while reducing stigma among fellow students as well as sharpen, practice, and develop professional skills. Peer Educators give reality based information campus wide in order to build a more conscious community, to reduce the prevalence of sexual irresponsibility, sexual violence and to increase self-protective behaviors.

THIS BILL

House Bill 496 would change Maryland's rape law to focus on whether there is

clear and voluntary agreement  
between the people involved.

The definition of consent proposed includes:

- Clear and voluntary agreement
- The right to withdraw consent
- Communication through words or conduct
- Consent is not:
  - what someone is wearing,
  - a prior relationship, or
  - as a result of fear, threat, or coercion
- Documentation is not required

As Morgan State University Peer Educators, we support the amending of the Consent Bill (HB 496) because the current definition of consent includes "force or threat of force" which directly impacts survivors. It takes away their level of security when testifying and sharing their story. Having to testify is already a stressful and traumatic process on its own, but having to prove force excludes other forms of rape such as coercion, just to name a few. It is also hard to substantiate force because it is subjective and hard to prove. Force is not just physical, force can be mental and emotional as well because of power dynamics that could be at play. For example, pressure from a boss to engage in sexual activity out of fear of consequences. Based off of the work that we do as Peer Educators, many people experience forms of rape that are

not as overtly forceful, but as equally traumatic, and those individuals deserve legal justice if they choose to do so.

Morgan State University Peer Educators urges the Judiciary Committee to report favorably on House Bill.