

To: Minnesota House of Representatives Committee on Education Policy
From: Ponny White, Minneapolis resident

My name is Ponny White, my pronouns are she/her, I am a co-leader of the MN Youth Activist Alliance of Advocates for Youth and a member of the Young Women's Cabinet appointed by Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan.

Before I begin I want to share that my statement includes mentions of sexual violence and child abuse. As a young person who has advocated for comprehensive sexual education courses on my college campus and went on to teach and facilitate comprehensive sexual education for people ages 10 - 22. I am writing in support of bill HF 358 which would ensure a comprehensive, age appropriate, and medically accurate sexual education curriculum for all public schools throughout our state.

In 2004 at the age of 4 years old I was repeatedly sexually molested by a family member who my mom entrusted to baby sit me while she was at work. This family member was 13 at the time, they were going through puberty, but lived in a home with strict ethnic guardians who would tell them false information about sex and their bodies. I remember hearing my cousin being told if a boy hugged her she would get pregnant. I remember her abuse as much as I remember the abuse she inflicted upon me trying to figure out her body and understand herself. I was a victim of assault and at the age of 4 all I knew was that if I talked about sex or things that were happening to my body I would be punished, so I never said anything. By the age of 14 adults were just starting to truly talk to me about sex and safety, while I appreciated my education, I couldn't help but think "I've spent my entire life replaying many of those moments in my head, being triggered by sexual comments and fearing all forms of intimacy." By the age of 15 I was finally able to forgive my abuser in my own way by realizing the abuse she inflicted on me was very much a result of the sex shaming and lack of education she received.

My experience gave me the voice to challenge the culture I grew up in that taught children to fear their bodies, a lesson that only enables sexual predators and perpetuates generations of sexual violence.

- Across the board young people between age 15-24 and people of color are disproportionately affected by STDs.
- Women's Fund MN documents that Eight percent (8%) of 11th grade girls in Minnesota report sexual abuse inside or outside of their family at some point in their life.
- 12.7% of sexual assault nationally, occurs to girls, trans/cis and nonbinary youth before the age of 10.
- 30.5% of sexual assault happens to girls and non binary youth between age 10-17.

I share all of these statistics and there are so many other statistics I can list to express that what occurred to me at 4 years old was not a special case. I was not the exception of what happens when we teach our children false information. Instead I was one of the millions of examples of why our current systems do not work. We need sex education that is honest, complete, and accurate. When sexuality is approached with silence and shame, young people face gender-based violence, increased risk of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, unhealthy relationships, and bullying and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender young people. Quality sex education includes information about sex, sexuality, relationships, consent, contraception and condoms, and how to protect yourself and plan your future.

I believe that House file 358 will ensure that all Minnesotan youth, from metro Minnesota throughout Greater Minnesota is provided with the skills and tools to make healthy decisions about sex and relationships, and that is far more effective than denying them information and simply telling them not to have sex

So In closing I would like to urge the committee to support HF 358
Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Ponny White