

Bill that would make grooming a felony in Minnesota moves forward

By Jennifer Mayerle

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A bill designed to stop children from being groomed in Minnesota schools is moving forward, introduced following a WCCO investigative series.

The Minnesota House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee voted unanimously Wednesday to keep HF 3489 bill going. The focus before the committee Wednesday was on a specific part of the bill: making grooming a chargeable felony offense.

Hannah LoPresto spoke before the committee about what she calls the grooming and sexual assault by her high school band teacher.

The detective who investigated her case testified about the similar themes and tactics he discovered during the course of a larger investigation.

The bill was brought by Republican Rep. Peggy Bennett, who says she was also groomed in high school.

LoPresto told members why closing gaps in law and making grooming a chargeable offense is critical.

"It lures you in by making you feel special, seen, understood, and then it preys on every vulnerability you have until you're trapped by shame. Shame wants you to hide, and hiding protects your abuser," LoPresto said. "At the height of its control, I would have done anything he asked. Grooming is not a precursor to abuse. It is abuse all on its own."

There were a few questions from members, but more gratitude and praise for the testifier's courage to speak up and to bring the bill forward.

The bill now moves on in the House's Children and Families Committee. The companion bill in the Senate will have a first hearing on Monday in the Education Policy Committee.