



February 17, 2021

Dear Committee Chair and Members,

The Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault (PAVSA) provides free crisis and supportive services to survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones in southern Saint Louis County. We ask you to support HF707.

We thank the Criminal Sexual Conduct Statutory Working Group and Office of Justice Programs for centering survivors' voices in the recommendations which inform this bill. As advocates, we have heard from both survivors and law enforcement partners that, as currently written, the criminal sexual conduct statutes are confusing and cumbersome. They also do not include some of the predatory behaviors that survivors have attempted to report. This bill refines definitions and addresses these gaps.

Passage of HF707 provides for the adoption of language which will:

- Create a new crime of sexual extortion which recognizes the experiences of many survivors who felt compelled to comply with unwanted sexual conduct because of extortion or blackmail.
- Expand the definition of mentally incapacitated to include circumstances where survivors ingested alcohol and/or drugs voluntarily which "renders them incapable of consenting or incapable of appreciating, understanding, or controlling the person's conduct."
- Clarify the definition of child victim, reduces the age gap between the victim and perpetrator, and eliminates "mistake of age" as a defense.

We ask you to support this bill to improve the response to sexual violence and to enhance safety in our communities. While this bill's approach is revisionist rather than wholesale, we believe that it is an important first step. We look forward to future statutory reforms and meaningful work to address racial bias in their application. Please contact us with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sara Niemi".

Sara Niemi
Executive Director