

To: Minnesota House of Representatives Committee on Education Policy

From: Kia Whittier, Minneapolis, 62B

My name is Kia Whittier, I am 25 years old, currently residing in Minneapolis and a constituent in MN House District 62B represented by Aisha Gomez. I am writing in support of House File 358/Senate File 632.

I was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri and throughout my entire educational career, from kindergarten to senior year of high school, I received minimal sex education. What I, as well as my classmates, received was a conversation on conception, how to avoid getting pregnant, and that sexual transmitted infections are “bad” – nothing more.

During my senior year of high school, I was sexually assaulted by someone that I knew. When I look back on this time and the harm that was caused to me I think about how differently things could have gone if I would have been equipped with the skills and tools to 1) recognize an unsafe situation, 2) feel empowered to voice my boundaries, outside of already saying “no” many times, and 3) understand that no matter what happens, it was not my fault, I am not alone, and that my response to the assault, both in the moment and after, were perfectly valid. And while it is never the fault of the person who was harmed, I believe having the skills and tools to feel empowered in my own body, learning about the signs of coercion and manipulation, and knowing the local resources to access after being sexually assaulted would have made the entire situation a bit easier to navigate.

During my undergrad at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, I became a state certified sexual assault crisis counselor and worked at the sexual violence program on campus. After I graduated, I began my career in this profession. One of my first jobs was working with youth who have experienced violence, whether from their partners, family members, or anyone else. I am extremely appreciative and grateful that a position like that existed – I was able to provide a non-judgmental, trauma-informed space for youth who have been harmed to talk through their issues, understand they are not alone, and learn skills and tools to help them feel empowered and navigate their challenges; however, it is a reactive step that local organizations have had to address, though it is an issue that our elected officials must be proactive about.

All students in Minnesota deserve to have access to comprehensive sex education free from any agenda other than to provide them with age-appropriate, culturally responsive, LGBTQ+ inclusive, shame free, scientific and medically accurate information so they can make informed decisions that work for them and their life. By not supporting HF 358/SF 632, you are preventing youth from learning skills and information that are necessary for existing in this world. You are letting youth know that harm can happen to them and that it is okay because you will not provide them with the pertinent and extremely necessary information, which is that everyone deserves to be free from harm and have their boundaries respected.

The onus should always be on the person who caused harm, as well as the systems that allow these issues to thrive. If the person who caused me harm would have understood that “yes means yes”, that body language and tone of voice can help in understanding if consent was given, and that coercion and manipulation are forms of abuse, then there’s a likely chance that I wouldn’t be writing this to you all today. Please support HF 358/SF 632, so you never have to receive stories about youth being sexually assaulted.