



**H. 183 – A Bill Related to Sexual Violence**  
**Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director**  
**Senate Education Committee – May 5, 2021**

Thank you for the invitation to provide testimony on H. 183, a bill which seeks to address and improve Vermont's system of response to sexual violence.

**Background and Context**

Sexual violence is a significant issue which impacts thousands of Vermonters each year. In the United States, approximately 1 in 5 women (19.3%) have experienced rape or attempted rape in their lifetime, and over 1 in 3 women (43.9%) have experienced other forms of sexual violence, such as sexual coercion or unwanted sexual contact<sup>1</sup>. Although national prevalence studies indicate that women carry the greatest burden of sexual violence over their lifetimes, men are also impacted by sexual violence. As with other forms of violence, some communities are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence – including Black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) and transgender and non-gender conforming individuals.

Vermont is not exempt from the significant impacts of sexual violence. In 2019, 1,408 individuals reached out to a Vermont Network Member Organization for assistance with some form of sexual violence. One in 10 female students in Vermont report being physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to<sup>2</sup>. Students of color in Vermont are more likely than white students to have ever been forced to have sexual intercourse, and LGBTQ students are more than three times as likely to be forced to have sexual intercourse compared to heterosexual or cisgender peers.

**Intercollegiate Council on Sexual Violence Prevention**

The House Version of H. 183 establishes the Intercollegiate Sexual Violence Prevention Council, which is what I am here to speak with you about today. The establishment of this Council was a key recommendation of the Legislative Task Force on Campus Sexual Harm of 2019 (report attached) and will serve to coordinate and innovate responses to sexual violence on college campuses across Vermont.

One in five female students and just over one in five transgender students are sexually assaulted on college campuses.<sup>3</sup> Women ages 18-24 are four times more likely than women of other ages to experience sexual violence.<sup>4</sup> Sexual violence within institutions of higher learning is complex. There are issues of both state and federal law, overlapping criminal jurisdictions, important issues of student privacy and extrajudicial Title IX proceedings.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control, National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), 2019

<sup>2</sup> 2017 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Vermont Department of Health

<sup>3</sup> David Cantor, Bonnie Fisher, Susan Chibnall, Reanna Townsend, et. al. Association of American Universities (AAU), Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct (September 21, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Rape and Sexual Victimization Among College-Aged Females, 1995-2013 (2014).



Despite many efforts, the process of reporting a sexual assault and making a formal Title IX complaint does not go well for many survivors. A recent report from the national organization Know Your IX, which works on Title IX issues found that “39 percent of survivors who reported sexual violence to their schools experienced a substantial disruption in their education...27 percent of survivors who reported took a leave of absence, 20 percent transferred schools, and nearly 10 percent dropped out of school entirely”<sup>5</sup>. Campuses also have varying resources and approaches. The support services and Title IX proceedings may differ based on the institutional resources available and dedicated to these efforts.

The solutions to these problems cannot be solved by institutions of higher learning alone. It requires an interdisciplinary approach with key stakeholders at the table. These complex issues also take time to address. The previous Legislative Task Force on Campus Sexual Harm of 2019 existed for only 9 months before sunseting. The Council proposed in H. 183 will assist in advancing needed institutional and justice system reforms and will assist in ensuring that responses and prevention efforts on campuses across Vermont are coordinated, and resources and approaches are shared across large and small private and public institutions.

Thank you for taking testimony on H. 183.

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<sup>5</sup> “The Cost of Reporting”, Know Your IX. Retrieved from: <https://www.knowyourix.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Know-Your-IX-2021-Report-Final-Copy.pdf>