



## **S.239 - Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Working Group**

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.239, which would establish the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Working Group.

Mandated reporting plays an important role in protecting children and youth and in alerting systems to potential abuse. At the same time, reporting is complex. While making a report can be an essential safety measure, it is not the only – nor always the most effective – way to support a victim. The key is finding the right balance that best serves the unique needs of each individual youth.

These complexities make mandatory reporting policies worthy of dedicated stakeholder discussion during the off-session, especially as best practices and other states' approaches continue to evolve.

As this committee considers the scope and priorities for the working group, we want to highlight two issues we consistently hear from our field:

### **1. The need to balance mandated reporting with access to confidential support.**

Despite being confidential crisis workers, most advocates supporting survivors of domestic and sexual violence are mandated reporters due to their agencies receiving Agency of Human Services funding. Victims of all ages benefit from confidential support, but youth often have little access to this confidentiality, because most adults in their support network – from advocates to teachers – are mandated reporters.

The fear of triggering an unwanted report can discourage some young people from asking for help, which ultimately undermines both safety and healing. The working group should consider how to maintain strong safety protections while also ensuring that youth have a pathway to confidential support, and whether older youth may require a differentiated approach within statutes and rules.

### **2. How mandated reporting statutes and rules address peer-to-peer sexual harm among older youth.**

Peer-to-peer sexual harm, sexual violence perpetrated by an older youth against another older youth, is unfortunately common. Currently, these cases generally trigger an automatic report to DCF, regardless of whether DCF is the most appropriate entity to support that young victim. The working group should examine when this response or alternative supports might better meet a youth's needs.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.