

Chair Williamson, Vice Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Georgia Gootie, and I write to you in advocacy of HB2657-2.

While I am now a Senior Assistant Dean of Admission at Reed College, the majority of my working career has been spent in the realm of direct education for young people. At times this has taken me as far as Africa, where I did preventative and responsive work with the US Peace Corps, but for four years it took me to the heart of southeast Portland, working alongside youth who had been previously adjudicated of crimes that were sexual or criminal in nature.

There, one of my primary responsibilities was to endow my students with an array of life skills that would ensure that once they began living independently, they were prepared for life outside of the correctional system. I truly believe one of the most fundamental parts of their successes has been my ardent support and involvement in providing them with reproductive education.

Over and over again I heard the same story from my youth who had committed crimes that were sexual in nature: the crime had not been born out of maliciousness, but instead of ignorance. The young men I worked with had often been victims of crimes themselves, and predatory behavior was normalized in their households. Repeatedly I heard that this was not a lone wolf stepping outside of cultural norms, but instead was a young person deeply entrenched in a cycle of toxic masculinity, confusion, misguided information, and ignorance. For those among them who had realized something unacceptable had occurred, they were so poorly equipped with coping skills, communication skills, or self-reflective insights that the ability to end the cycle themselves was impossible. The pull of the vortex was too strong.

The way we can stymie these trends, the way we can uproot these norms and plant seeds of hope in their place, is education. The best disinfectant is sunlight, and the ability to speak openly with my students about their questions concerning sex, relationships, boundaries, body parts, and emotions was nothing short of transformation, both for them and for me. Sometimes these questions were straight forward, mere instructions and labels for body parts or cycles of life. Other times they sat with me and their peers and together we waded through deeper conversations, nuanced ones that may never have simple answers at the end, but were always worthwhile.

I have seen the impact that a lack of sex education in a community makes. It doesn't stay stagnant, but ripples out like a wave, rocking even the smallest parts of a community. Equipping our young people with the education they deserve about one of the longest lasting, most impactful parts of their life is a fundamental part of building safe, nurturing, long-lasting communities. The price we pay for ignoring this is too high, and I have seen it paid first-hand.

Thank you for the time that you have spent considering the benefits of this bill. It is not lost on me that legislation is a big task, and these decisions take careful thought. I appreciate the willingness you have to look into expanding what has long been too small of an effort in our state and hope that you will support HB2657-2 in your vote.

Warmly,

Georgia Gootie
Member of the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force Board