

2/1/2023

Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Support Senate Bill 605

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Audrey Bong and I live in Portland, OR. I am a senior at Riverdale High School who helped write and campaign for this bill and am a leader of the Youth Interpersonal Violence Prevention Coalition.

When I was growing up, I was taught that explicit media distribution, more commonly known as sexting, was wrong. I was told that no kids “sext” and kids that do are trouble or need counseling. However, as a High School senior, I know that this isn’t true; that most teens exchange explicit photos and aren’t always troubled or need more parental supervision.

One of the reasons I know this is because of YouthLine, which is a teen-to-teen crisis line that I have been volunteering at for over two years. I take calls, chats, and texts for 6 hours every week across the globe right here in Oregon, and it is astounding how many callers we have had from middle and high school kids who have had experience sexting. While there have been many cases where teens have been manipulated or coerced into sending explicit photos, the lionshare of our callers actually consent to experimenting with explicit content. For many kids, sexting has actually become a key part of their development.

But we are still facing issues. Even if both teens consent at the time, there is no telling where some photos and videos can live. The chance that teenagers could be charged with a Class B Felony for sexting is petrifying. For teens I’ve spoken to at YouthLine, this seems like an unsolvable problem: they can’t take any risks in exploring their sexual development and if they choose to, they can’t hold anyone accountable for spreading their personal pictures because they are scared of a felony charge. That is what is holding us back today, the fact that youth are scared of the legal repercussions of their sexual exploration.

I specifically remember one caller from Hillsboro I spoke to who was 14 and exchanged explicit photos with her boyfriend of three years. She called us in a panic attack, sobbing, because her boyfriend left his phone at school and she was worried about the legal trouble she might be in if someone else saw the phone and reported her. She had absolutely no regrets about sending the photos, but was completely terrified that she might be charged with a felony for engaging in this level of intimacy.

My work at YouthLine is what inspired me to work on this bill, so that I could support the teens across Oregon, just like that 14 year old from Hillsboro, through legislation. I hope you can recognize our voices as youth and understand the importance of supporting this bill, so that youth in the state are no longer scared in the current legal system.

Sincerely,
Audrey Bong
Youth Interpersonal Violence Prevention Coalition

