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CITY BAR

COMMITTEE ON SEX AND LAW

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December 9, 2014

Hon. Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
478 Russell
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: Connecting Sexual Violence with the Need for
Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

The Sex and Law Committee of the New York City Bar Association writes to express our appreciation for your leadership in addressing the issue of sexual assault on school campuses. We further write to enlist your help in initiating a proactive, long-term approach to reducing rates of sexual violence by lending your public support to policies that advance comprehensive sex education.

Rates of sexual violence are astounding. Nearly one in five women in the United States reports having been raped, and one in four women reports having experienced unwanted sexual contact.¹ Yet proposed policy solutions are often reactive and limited. A comprehensive solution must aim to prevent sexual violence before it ever starts. This means that we must connect the norms that perpetuate sexual violence with the need to prepare young people from an early age to engage in healthy relationships, which is a core component of comprehensive sex education.

Sexual violence and harassment start early. One out of 10 high school students reports being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon by someone that student was dating, according to the Center for Disease Control's 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance.² The same percentage of students report being forcibly kissed, touched, or made to engage in sexual intercourse.³ These statistics are not only alarming, but have wider implications for our communities, public health, and the future of our young people.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report, http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance - United States, 2013", Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 63:4, June 13, 2014 at 10, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6304.pdf>.

³ *Id.* at 11.

To be sure, a problem as prevalent and deeply rooted as sexual violence requires a multi-dimensional, multi-sector response. At the core of any such policy response must be a comprehensive sex education program in all of our schools. While young people need to learn how to protect themselves against the triple threat of HIV, sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies, comprehensive sex education includes more than these bare essentials. Comprehensive sex education provides young people the tools they need to build healthy relationships and prevent sexual violence in our communities.

Released in 2012, the National Sexuality Education Standards establish a thorough catalog of essential sex education content.⁴ The standards promote healthy relationship-building skills as one of seven fundamental components to a comprehensive sex education curriculum. Lessons focus not only on physical development, pregnancy, and STIs, but also on safety, respect and consent, sexual decision-making, self-efficacy, sexual orientation and gender identity, and awareness about cultural messages that reinforce gender norms and sexual violence. These curricular standards are essential to challenging societal messages that implicitly and explicitly condone misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and the violence and sexualized bullying that too often result. Further, the learning is age-appropriate and cumulative so that all students from kindergarten through high school are receiving and building on information that is right for their level of cognitive and social development.

As recent reports and events have shown, preventing sexual violence must be a priority for our policy makers and educators. Too often, comprehensive sex education is pushed to the back burner, and our communities and young people pay the price. However, over 90 percent of high school parents support teaching comprehensive sex education, and 72 percent describe it as very important.⁵ Fortunately, some states and cities across the country, including Chicago⁶ and Washington DC,⁷ are leading the movement by requiring comprehensive sex education in schools. The vast majority of states, however, are being left behind.

It is essential that we take meaningful action now to ensure that the National Sexuality Education Standards are widely adopted and enforced, so that all students receive comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education from kindergarten through high school.

We believe you can be a powerful voice in helping to make the connection between sexual assault prevention and the need for comprehensive sex education and in persuading

⁴ National Sexuality Education Standards, <http://www.futureofsexed.org/documents/josh-fose-standards-web.pdf>.

⁵ National Public Radio/Kaiser Family Foundation/Kennedy School of Government, "Sex Education in America: General Public/Parents Survey", January 2004, at 5, <http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/2004/jan/kaiserpoll/publicfinal.pdf>.

⁶ Chicago Department of Public Health, "Sexual Education Policy in Illinois and Chicago", June 2013, http://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/cdph/policy_planning/Board_of_Health/HCPolicyBriefJune2013.pdf.

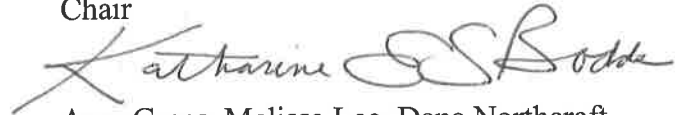
⁷ D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, "Health Education Standards", August, 2008, <http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/Files/downloads/TEACHING%20&%20LEARNING/Learning%20Standards%202009/DCPS-HEALTH910-STANDARDS.pdf>.

other national, state, and city lawmakers and officials to take necessary steps to prevent sexual violence before it ever starts.

We welcome an opportunity to meet with your office to discuss further.

Respectfully,

Katharine Bodde
Chair

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Amy Gross, Melissa Lee, Dana Northcraft
Subcommittee on Comprehensive Sexuality
Education



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Hon. Letitia James

Public Advocate for the City of New York

1 Centre Street
#1500
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Connecting Sexual Violence with the Need for Comprehensive
Sexuality Education**

Dear Public Advocate James:

The Sex and Law Committee of the New York City Bar Association writes to express our appreciation for your leadership in addressing the issue of sexual assault on school campuses. We further write to enlist your help in initiating a proactive, long-term approach to reducing rates of sexual violence by lending your public support to policies that advance comprehensive sex education.

More than two years ago, former Schools Chancellor Walcott announced that New York City would require middle and high schools to provide sex education. It is time for the de Blasio Administration to take the next step.¹ The New York City Department of Education should pass a Chancellor's Regulation that: (i) adopts the National Sexuality Education Standards and requires comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education to be taught in Kindergarten through High School; (ii) meaningfully implements this curriculum, including by requiring those who teach sex education to receive appropriate training and by making that training readily available; and (iii) creates a meaningful monitoring plan to ensure that appropriate sex education is being delivered to all New York City Schools students.

Rates of sexual violence are astounding. Nearly one in five women in the United States reports having been raped, and one in four women reports having experienced unwanted sexual contact.² Yet proposed policy solutions are often reactive and limited. A comprehensive solution must aim to prevent sexual violence before it even starts. This means that we must connect the

¹ New York City Department of Education, Sex Education in New York City Schools, <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/FitnessandHealth/StandardsCurriculum/sexeducation.htm>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report, http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf.

norms that perpetuate sexual violence with the need to prepare young people from an early age to engage in healthy relationships, which is a core component of comprehensive sex education.

Sexual violence and harassment start early. One out of 10 high school students reports being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon by someone that student was dating, according to the Center for Disease Control's 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance.³ The same percentage of students report being forcibly kissed, touched, or made to engage in sexual intercourse.⁴ These alarming statistics have wide implications for our communities, public health, and the future of our young people.

To be sure, a problem as prevalent and deeply rooted as sexual violence requires a multi-dimensional, multi-sector response. At the core of any such policy response must be a comprehensive sex education program in all of our schools. While young people need to learn how to protect themselves against the triple threat of HIV, sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies, comprehensive sex education includes more than these bare essentials. Comprehensive sex education provides young people the tools they need to build healthy relationships and prevent sexual violence in our communities.

Released in 2012, the National Sexuality Education Standards establish a thorough catalog of essential sex education content.⁵ The standards promote healthy relationship-building skills as one of seven fundamental components to a comprehensive sex education curriculum. Lessons focus not only on physical development, pregnancy, and STIs, but also on safety, respect and consent, sexual decision-making, self-efficacy, sexual orientation and gender identity, and awareness about cultural messages that reinforce gender norms and sexual violence. These curricular standards are essential to challenging societal messages that implicitly and explicitly condone misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and the violence and sexualized bullying that too often result. Further, the learning is age-appropriate and cumulative so that all students from kindergarten through high school are receiving and building on information that is right for their level of cognitive and social development.

As recent reports and events have shown, preventing sexual violence must be a priority for our policy makers and educators. Too often, comprehensive sex education is pushed to the back burner, and our communities and young people pay the price. However, over 90 percent of high school parents support teaching comprehensive sex education, and 72 percent describe it as very important.⁶ Fortunately, some states and cities across the country, including Chicago⁷ and

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Washington DC,⁸ are leading the movement by requiring comprehensive sex education in schools. The vast majority of states, however, are being left behind. While efforts have been made to pass meaningful reform on the state level, Albany is locked in a political stalemate. It is up to localities, including New York City, the largest school district in the country, to do right by our youth and communities.

New York City has the opportunity – indeed, the responsibility – to be a leader in high quality, comprehensive sex education that teaches not just the basic prevention lessons, but also provides young people the skills necessary to build healthy relationships and communities. A safe, healthy New York City requires nothing less.

We believe you can be a powerful voice in helping to make the connection between sexual assault and the need for comprehensive sex education and in persuading other city lawmakers and officials to take necessary steps to prevent sexual violence before it starts.

We welcome an opportunity to meet with your office to discuss further.

Respectfully,

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December 9, 2014

Rep. Carolyn Maloney
United States House of Representatives
2308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Connecting Sexual Violence with the Need for
Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

Dear Representative Maloney:

The Sex and Law Committee of the New York City Bar Association writes to express our appreciation for your recent efforts to help address the issue of sexual assault on school campuses. We further write to enlist your help in initiating a proactive, long-term approach to reducing rates of sexual violence by lending your public support to policies that advance comprehensive sex education.

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