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**TESTIMONY OF KRISTIN GALLAGHER AND MELISSA LEE
MEMBERS, SEX AND LAW COMMITTEE
OF THE NEW YORK CITY BAR ASSOCIATION**

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
HEARING ON PROPOSED INT. NO. 517-A,
IN RELATION TO INFORMATION AND CITY SERVICES
TO REDUCE COLLEGE SEXUAL ASSAULT**

February 4, 2015

My name is Kristin Gallagher, and I am a member of the Sex and Law Committee of the New York City Bar Association. I am testifying today on behalf of the Sex and Law Committee. We thank the Committee on Higher Education for this opportunity. Our Committee collectively represents a broad cross-section of the legal community, including civil rights attorneys, public defense attorneys, prosecutors, and attorneys with expertise in public health policy, education, and childhood development. My testimony today is based on the expertise of our members.

First, we commend the Committee on Higher Education for taking this vital step to reduce sexual assault on college campuses. However, while our committee does support the passage of Int. No. 517-A, we additionally urge the Council to prioritize pursuing a comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education plan that engages all New York City students. It is our position that, to prevent sexual violence before it ever starts, we must connect norms of sexual violence with the need to prepare young people to engage in healthy relationships from an early age.

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 they were dating.¹ The same percentage of students report being forcibly kissed, touched or made to engage in sexual intercourse.² These alarming statistics have wide implications for our communities, public health, and the future of our young people.

¹ 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>.

² *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* policy response should be a comprehensive sex education program that reaches *all* of our students, and reaches them early.

Cities across the country, including Chicago and Washington DC, are leading the movement by requiring and implementing comprehensive sex education programs in schools from Kindergarten through 12th Grade. New York, however, is being left behind.

Accordingly, the Sex and Law Committee of the New York City Bar Association recommends that the City Council not only pursue the educational program as currently outlined in paragraph (b) of the proposed bill, but that the City Council go a crucial step further. We urge the Council to actively work with the Mayor's Office to finally establish and implement a plan that guarantees that all New York City youth will receive medically-accurate, comprehensive, developmentally appropriate sexuality education from Kindergarten through the 12th Grade. Such a curriculum should reflect the National Sexuality Education Standards³ and cover (i) healthy relationships and healthy decision-making; (ii) body image and self-esteem; (iii) gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity; (iv) the benefits of delaying sexual activity; (v) risk behaviors and prevention methods; (vi) strategies for preventing, recognizing, and addressing bullying and sexual violence; and (vii) the use of technology and social media in intimate relationships.

In conclusion, for the foregoing reasons, the Sex and Law Committee asks that the Council pass Int. No. 517-A. Further, we respectfully request that the Council take steps now to ensure the implementation of a plan that will finally provide *all* New York City students with the educational opportunities they so desperately need to keep them both healthy and safe. Our youth and our communities deserve nothing less.

³ Released in 2012, the National Sexuality Education Standards establish a thorough catalog of essential sex education content. 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. See National Sexuality Education Standards, <http://www.futureofsexed.org/documents/josh-fose-standards-web.pdf>.