

Thank you, Senators and Assembly people, for taking the time to read my testimony about the importance of implementing a universal sex education program in New York State as a way to help prevent sexual violence.

When I was 15 years old, I was sexually assaulted, by people that I trusted, and I thought cared about me. It changed my life forever, where the people around me didn't believe me, where I forced to feel ashamed about what had happened to me, when in reality it wasn't my fault. So, as a 25-year-old law student, I decided to stop being ashamed of what had happened to me and turn my trauma into legislation against sexual violence.

We are living in a national health and moral crisis, where every 73 seconds an American is sexually assaulted and every 9 minutes, that victim is a child. Every single year, over 400,000 Americans from ages 12 and older are raped and sexually assaulted each year in the United States. 1 out of every 6 American women is a survivor of an attempted or completed rape. Majority of the legislation that we have formulated is geared towards helping people after rape and assault has happened, but my question is what are we doing to prevent rapes from happening in the first place? The first step, is through implementing primary prevention programs that teach consent and sexual assault starting from kindergarten until 12th grade. Now, there's a lot of misconception on primary prevention that we are teaching young students what sexual violence and sexual assault is, but in reality from kindergarten until about 8th grade students are being taught consent and healthy boundaries. It is not until the student reaches high school, where the curriculum begins to shift to teaching students about sexual assault and rape. By implementing a universal, comprehensive, medically accurate sex education program that teaches consent and sexual violence, we can begin to reinvent the ideas that society has instilled in how each gender is "supposed to act." Breaking these gender norms starts by simply teaching young children in schools that yes means yes and no means no.

According to Columbia University's Sexual Health Initiative to Foster Transformation (SHIFT) project, comprehensive sex education protects students from sexual assault, even after primary school has ended. They also found in their study that religious and abstinence programs had no effect on primary prevention against sexual violence. Lastly, SHIFT also found that students who commit crimes of sexual assault in higher education, did so before they entered, with a general age of 15 years old.

In the New York City area alone, there are approximately 1,700 public schools and none of these schools are required to teach medically accurate sex education. In New York State, sex education is not required and in Buffalo, New York, students are still taught abstinence as the key to protecting themselves.

But the "conventional" way and the way that things have always been done has led us into this crisis of sexual violence, where the majority of survivors are women.

When I was reading through the New York State budget, there was nothing in the budget to combat this problem. The effects of sexual violence on students is long lasting and has an impact on the future generation. According to RAINN, females ages 16-19 are **4 times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault**. The effects of child sexual abuse can be long-lasting and affect the victim's mental health. Victims of child abuse are more likely than non-victims to experience the following mental health challenges: (1) About 4 times more likely to develop symptoms of drug abuse, (2) About 4 times more likely to experience PTSD as adults, and (3) About 3 times more likely to experience a major depressive episode as adults.

In addition to this, studies have shown that sexual assault and harassment victims experienced behavioral problems, including having difficulties concentrating on schoolwork, poor school performance, and poor academic work. These statistics are real and sexual violence doesn't just affect the survivors, but it affects us all. Now, I don't have all the answers to preventing sexual violence and there isn't a straight answer to ending it completely, but we can begin to prevent it just by simply educating students on sexual violence and consent. So, Senators and Assembly people, I advocate for primary prevention because if I can prevent one person from going through what I went through and for them to know that they are not alone, then that is enough and that starts with implementing these programs. Sex education isn't just about teaching children how to practice safe sex, it's about shaping, educating, and empowering them to realize why consent is so important and how sexual violence impacts us all.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Chandler Jacobs