

Press Release...



From the Office of State Representative Ann Williams

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rep. Ann Williams (D-Chicago) Introduces Legislation on Teaching Comprehensive Consent as part of Sex Ed

Rep. Ann Williams (D-Chicago) has introduced HB 3550, a bill to add a clear, comprehensive definition of consent to Illinois sex education curriculum.

“Understanding consent is a critical part of the conversation on sexual assault prevention,” said Williams. “We cannot wait until students go to college or into the workplace to have a discussion about what it means to consent to sexual interaction. We need to start early with age-appropriate instruction on what consent means.”

While sex education is not mandatory in Illinois, reforms passed in 2013 provided that school districts which elected to teach sex ed must include medically accurate information about contraception and STDs. While these reforms were an important step, the need to discuss consent as part of a sex ed curriculum has gained heightened attention in the wake of the #metoo movement - and far too many reports about sexual abuse in our secondary schools, including within Chicago Public Schools. While Illinois continues to evaluate and consider improvements to its sex education laws, it is critical that teaching consent be a foundational component of any curriculum.

Even within Illinois, teen sexual violence remains a pressing issue. A recent report from the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. found that Illinois teens experienced higher percentages of physically forced intercourse, physical dating violence and sexual dating violence compared to the national average.

“It’s never too early to begin educating about consent,” said Sarah Layden, Director of Programs and Public Policy at Resilience. “Education on consent fosters compassion, empathy, accountability, and respect for others’ boundaries. It provides a framework for

helping young people understand that the choices they make, the behaviors and actions they take, affect others. In the same way, it empowers youth to identify and assert their own boundaries in relationships and beyond.”

Currently, fewer than 12 states that require sex education mention the terms “healthy relationships”, “sexual assault” or “consent” in their sex education programs, according to a report released last May from the Center for American Progress. Recently, a 12-year-old girl in Maryland worked to pass legislation in her home state to mandate the teaching of consent as part of any sex ed curriculum. While consent is briefly mentioned in the School Code in Illinois, no definition or guidance is provided.

“In order to prevent sexual violence, we need to teach teens about how to talk about sex, including how to give and obtain consent. Even the highest-quality sex education will not prevent sexual assault if it doesn't teach affirmative consent,” said Kaethe Morris, Executive Director of The Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation. “Ignoring consent as part of sex education not only contributes to sexual harm in schools. Rep. Williams' bill will ensure this information is a necessary part of comprehensive sex education.”

HB 3550 provides a comprehensive definition of consent, and utilizes the definition from the “Preventing Sexual Violence in Higher Education Act,” which addresses conversations with students on campus.

“Teaching young people about consent is an essential component of comprehensive sexual health and abuse prevention,” said Char Rivette, Executive Director of the Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center. “It’s time Illinois updated our statute to provide school districts with best-practice guidance regarding the definition of consent.”

Currently, this legislation has public support and backing from the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, Planned Parenthood of Illinois, National Association of Social Workers of Illinois, the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center and the Resilience, formerly Rape Victim Advocates. For more information about this legislation please contact Rep. Ann Williams at (217) 782-2458.

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