

**Testimony in Support of
Am. House Bill 19**

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Katie Edwards and I am an advanced doctoral student in clinical psychology at Ohio University. On behalf of the Ohio Psychological Association, I am here to speak in support of House Bill 19 (HB 19), which would lead to school districts implementing dating violence education within the health education curriculum. I believe that I am in a position to speak about HB 19 given my extensive involvement in dating violence research and clinical work over the past six years. Specifically, I have conducted numerous empirical investigations related to the causes, consequences, and perhaps most importantly, the **prevention of dating violence**. This research has been presented at regional and national conferences and published in scientific journals. Further, I have worked with survivors and perpetrators of dating violence in multiple clinical settings.

To begin, national research data suggests that the majority of adolescents will experience some type of psychological, physical, or sexual victimization by a dating partner in their lifetime. My research with 18-year-old students at Ohio University who recently graduated from high school is consistent with this national data (see Table 1 for rates). Other research in the state of Ohio has found disturbing rates of dating violence. For example, results from the 2007 Ohio Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 13% of Ohio high school females reported a history of rape. Results from this survey also documented that 10% of high school students (male and female) were physically abused by a dating partner *in the past year*. It is important to point out that while males and females demonstrate similar rates of physical and psychological perpetration, dating aggression perpetrated by males is often more severe and associated with greater physical and psychological consequences than dating aggression perpetrated by females. Further, females' use of aggression is more commonly motivated by self-defense than males' use of aggression.

Table 1. Lifetime Prevalence Rates of Adolescent Dating Violence Victimization and Perpetration among Ohioans

| | Victimization | Perpetration |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Sexual Aggression ^a | 35% | 25% |
| Psychological Aggression | 55% | 45% |
| Physical Aggression | 30% | 28% |

^aGiven that the vast majority of sexual violence victims are females and sexual violence perpetrators are males, victimization rates are only for females and perpetration rates are only for males.

Dating violence leads to a host of deleterious consequences, both short- and long-term. My research as well as other research in Ohio and across the nation suggests that victims of dating violence are at risk to experience a host of psychological consequences including (but not limited to) anxiety, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, and self-injurious thoughts and behaviors. Further, victims of dating violence also experience greater rates of physical health problems than individuals without victimization histories. Long-term consequences of dating violence include continued physical and psychological distress, along with an increased risk to experience subsequent abuse later in life.

Given the high rates of dating violence in Ohio and the negative consequences associated with dating violence, **primary prevention is critical**. Unlike secondary and tertiary prevention efforts which target abuse once it has already occurred, primary prevention efforts target abuse prior to its occurrence. **A key component to primary prevention is the creation and implementation of dating violence educational interventions**, as recommended in HB 19.

Specifically, in HB 19, districts would implement dating violence education for grades seven through twelve that would include definitions of dating violence, the warning signs of dating violence, and characteristics of healthy relationships. This type of programming is necessary given that students are not likely to receive this type of information from any other source. In fact, **research suggests that over half of parents admit they that have never spoken to their child about dating violence**. Moreover, many teenagers do not know what constitutes dating violence or the negative consequences associated with it, which result in greater tolerance and normalization of dating violence. In fact, in my own research, I have found that most individuals remain in abusive dating relationships for some time following the initial incident of abuse. Taken together, it is crucial that teenagers be educated about dating violence, something that HB 19 is proposing to do through the school system.

The school system is an ideal setting to implement these types of educational programs. Currently, most dating violence educational programs occur on college campuses. However, for many individuals, by the time they attend college, the cycle of dating violence has already begun. Further, nearly half of high school graduates in Ohio (43%)

do not enroll in college immediately after graduating. This further underscores the importance of early dating violence education in middle and high school, which would reach significantly more individuals than programming solely on college campuses.

It's highly likely that the passage of HB 19 will lead to decreased rates of dating violence in the state of Ohio. In fact, outcome research with teenagers suggests that school-based dating violence educational programs are effective in increasing knowledge about dating violence, altering attitudes so that dating violence is viewed as less acceptable, and reducing rates of dating violence victimization and perpetration. For example empirical evaluations of *Safe Dates*, a school-based program designed to prevent psychological, physical, and sexual dating aggression, has demonstrated encouraging results. Specifically, results from these studies showed that students who participated in the *Safe Dates* program, compared to students who did not, reported less dating violence victimization and perpetration at the one-month and three-year follow-up periods.

In addition to likely decreased rates of dating violence in Ohio, HB 19 will likely result in averted social costs. For example, research suggests that the 1994 Violence Against Women Act that provided \$1.6 billion for programs saved nearly \$15 billion in averted social costs.

On behalf of the Ohio Psychological Association and the approximately 900,000 teenagers living in Ohio, I urge each of you to support HB 19 and join the mission to end dating violence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee for allowing me to speak with you about this critical issue facing our state. I would be happy to address any questions that you all might have.