

## PROTECT SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS OPPOSE SB 576

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Chairman Lozano and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I respectfully offer this testimony to express my strong opposition to SB 576, a bill that would deprive sexual assault survivors of the agency and resources they need to effectively cope with their assault.

### ► ROBS SURVIVORS OF AGENCY

Expanded mandatory reporting takes power away from survivors. A study at The University of Texas at Austin, the university I attend [4], found that only 32% of sexual assault survivors told anyone about their assault—and of them, only 6% reported it through an official university channel. Their reasons vary: they may fear reprisal by the perpetrator, depend on their assailant financially, be dissuaded by rampant mishandling of sexual assault cases, or simply be embarrassed or ashamed [9]. Regardless of why survivors decide to report or not to report, this choice is often one of the few measures of control survivors feel they have. Survivors already feel powerless after an assault [12, 7, 6]. The state shouldn't be taking away what little power they still have.

### ► TAKES AWAY SUPPORT SYSTEMS

At UT, student organizations like Voices Against Violence and Not On My Campus not only advocate on behalf of survivors—they also serve as confidential support systems that survivors can turn to. Students may also feel inclined to disclose their assaults to an officer of another organization. Yet this bill guts the ability for organization officers to serve as confidential advisors—and even though added Section 51.282(b) narrows the mandate for officers to report, it's still far too broad. As a result, organizations whose entire purpose is to support survivors won't be able to, because honoring survivors' pleas for confidentiality would be illegal [8].

### ► NEEDLESSLY EXPANDS MANDATORY REPORTING

There's no reason to expand mandatory reporting at universities. After the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance on college sexual assault in 2011 [1], universities across the country made most faculty and staff mandatory reporters [3, 14, 11, 5]. Now, SB 576 seeks to widen this requirement to include *all* employees—even those exempt from existing mandatory reporting policies—and student organization leaders. Students who wish to report to law enforcement already have the means to do so. What they need is a place they can go for confidential support and advice. Under this bill, those places will be nearly impossible to find.

### ► DOESN'T ACHIEVE INTENDED PURPOSE

The author's stated motive for filing SB 576 stems from the Baylor sexual assault scandal, and a desire to provide more accurate data on sexual assault on college campuses [2, 10]. Her focus on sexual assault is admirable, but the proposal before you misses the mark. We already have ample data from anonymous surveys, such as the UT report [4]. Given how few survivors report their assaults, these surveys are much more accurate than official reporting rates. And the Baylor case didn't arise because survivors weren't reporting assaults, but rather because Baylor officials mishandled reports that they were receiving [13]. I commend the Legislature for its efforts to end campus sexual assault, but I urge you to pursue policies that more effectively address this issue.

My testimony, and the others you have seen and will see today, together make a strong case against this dangerous legislation. While the purpose of SB 576 is laudable, any policy to combat sexual assault should consider *survivors' needs first*—something SB 576 does not do. Please, listen to the needs and concerns of the citizens you represent, and vote to prevent this bill from becoming law.

Sincerely,

Alex A. Meed

# SUPPLEMENTS

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