



A Call to Action From The Every Voice Coalition - Pennsylvania

My name is Ari Fromm, and I am the founder and Co-State Director of the Pennsylvania chapter of The Every Voice Coalition. I am speaking to you today about the It's On Us bill package, however, not just as an organizer, but also as a current Pennsylvania college student.

The Every Voice Coalition is a national movement working to fight campus sexual violence by passing students' and survivors' rights into law at the state level. We as an organization are led and run by students and recent alumni who are all allies and survivors. Since EVC's founding seven years ago, we have started movements in 12 states, passed laws in 5, and engaged thousands of students on campuses across the country.

I joined The Every Voice Coalition in the fall of 2020. As a 21-year-old stuck inside during the pandemic, witnessing what felt like the world crumbling around me, I said to myself "Enough is enough." I knew, as a college student, that changes needed to be made at my school and across the state, and I knew those changes weren't close to happening. So I decided to start spending my free time fighting for survivors' rights and forging a better reality.

I founded the Pennsylvania chapter of Every Voice in January of 2021 and started building out our coalition remotely. I worked with Governor Wolf, his office, and It's On Us to draft the Yes Means Yes bill and the climate survey resolution. I reached out to my peers, and pretty soon I built out a team of current PA students from across the state. Our members now span 12 campuses, public and private, rural and urban. Our Campus Leads are petitioning their universities to start making the policy changes we advocate for on the state level, and our Steering Committee works tirelessly every week to expand our reach, organize direct action, and keep pushing for our legislation. EVC PA's students are a force to be reckoned with.

In the last year, we helped introduce EVC language in the It's On Us bill package, and my fellow Co-State Director Justin and I spoke at Governor Wolf's press conference for their introduction. We sent over 570 student-written letters to legislators urging action on these bills. We've partnered with statewide and local anti-sexual-violence organizations, and we're currently organizing a Survivors' Rights Day of Action on campuses across the state to mark Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April. This pain has gone on far too long, so we students have taken on the burden of fighting campus sexual violence. That should not be our responsibility.

Sexual violence impacts millions of Americans each year and has been declared a "silent, violent epidemic" by the American Medical Association. With an estimated 1 in 10 students experiencing sexual violence during their time in college, sexual violence will directly affect an

estimated 60,000 Pennsylvania college students in 2022. However, national statistics show that only around 5-10% of students who experience campus sexual violence report to official channels such as Title IX or Campus Law Enforcement. This number is shockingly low and shows a clear gap between what is happening on campuses and what is being reported by institutions.

Since so few students are comfortable reporting, we know that support resources need to be available to students regardless of their choice to report. However, as our system currently stands, with many university employees operating as mandatory reporters and with so much stigma around survivorship, many student survivors feel unsafe even asking for help. As a result, people end up falling through the cracks. National studies estimate that more than 40% of student survivors suffer from PTSD, and while PTSD is treatable, over a third of those students are forced to take a leave of absence, transfer, or drop out. 10% leave school altogether. Student survivors need support. They need resources from their schools in order to heal and get back on track with their education. Existing resources for student survivors are few and far between, and those that do exist (like rape crisis centers) are often inaccessible. The cost of inaction on students is immense.

Luckily, there are concrete actions we can take, right now, to address campus sexual violence. First and foremost, to attempt to support students, we need a better idea of what is going on in our state. Right now, universities are only required to publicly display data around reported and convicted crimes. However, since only 5-10% of survivors report, and only a fraction of those instances result in a criminal conviction, the data schools are reporting is massively unrepresentative. Penn State Main Campus, for example, reported 169 instances of sexual misconduct through the Clery Act in 2018 (which is 0.361% of the student population). According to their most recent campus climate survey, however, 1/4 of undergraduates in 2018 experienced some instance of sexual violence (which equates to about 11,422 people, so that's around 11,253 survivors erased and silenced on that campus alone).

Penn State Main Campus is a unique example only because we actually have the relevant data. Most schools in Pennsylvania do not conduct campus climate surveys, so we have no idea just how large the discrepancy between reported and actual instances of sexual violence is. We have no idea how many survivors are being silenced. Climate survey resolution SR122 would create a taskforce to investigate this discrepancy and determine whether campus climate surveys need to be required across the state. I urge you to support this resolution so we can begin to understand the scope of campus sexual violence in the Commonwealth.

Beyond campus climate surveys, Every Voice PA believes that institutions of higher education need to work to actively prevent campus sexual violence by educating students about the issue when they first start school. That's where the Yes Means Yes bill comes in.

The Yes Means Yes bill (SB730) takes common sense steps to improve the existing programs and resources that already exist for fighting sexual violence. Incoming students already receive some initial training into sexual violence and sexual violence prevention, but the training requirements are outdated and insufficient. This bill would simply update those trainings to make them more modern and effective, such as by teaching students about affirmative consent.

Even more crucially, this bill would address the lack of resources for student survivors by requiring institutions of higher education to communicate with their local rape crisis centers to collaborate on trainings and ensure that students can access existing resources. These resources are already out there for student survivors, but plenty of students don't know about them and/or are unable to get to rape crisis centers. All too often, student survivors are left on their own to figure out what they need, to help themselves heal through trauma while also managing their education and everything else that college entails. This bill is the first step to addressing survivor dropout. The Yes Means Yes bill is a chance to take action.

Pennsylvania has the opportunity to step up and fill the gaps left in current school resources and prevention efforts. School-level policy change alone cannot encompass the necessity and urgency of what we are seeking today. Pennsylvania CAN and should codify greater access to prevention, resources, and support regardless of what political issues are driving the legislature apart right now.

As we move forward, I urge you to think about who you are hearing from when you are drafting and passing legislation. Whose voices are you incorporating? Are you taking into account the needs and demands of those most affected? When it comes to campus sexual violence, are you and your colleagues listening to students? Because we're here, we know what needs to change, and we're speaking out.

In conclusion, I want to thank you all for having me here today and for taking the time to learn about the issue of campus sexual violence. On behalf of students in Pennsylvania, I ask for your support: It would mean fewer students will be forced to navigate the silencing, blaming, and traumatizing experience of campus sexual violence that overshadows and, all too often, derails their time in college.

May you act with urgency to codify our rights.

Thank you.