

Good Afternoon Chairman *Gaffey* and members of the Education Committee. My name is Linda Trahan and I am from Brooklyn, CT. I am here today to speak in support of House Bill 6494.

For a very long time I have believed we are missing crucial opportunities to address our domestic violence problem. Programs currently exist to assist victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, but very few, if any, programs exist to assist teens. Young people must be provided with education to understand healthy and unhealthy behaviors in dating relationships. Giving young people this foundation will hopefully result in fewer cases of domestic violence in the future.

I have been employed as a counselor with the Department of Correction for the past ten years. In that time I have worked with countless perpetrators of domestic violence. I facilitate the domestic violence education program at the Brooklyn Correctional Institution. Time and again during these classes, offenders have stated that they did not have information or tools to make other choices when they committed their violent behavior. They often cannot even describe what it means to be in a healthy relationship. Many have grown up in violent homes and equate power and control with love. They have witnessed violence, and in turn chosen to be violent with their partners, often exposing their own children to violence and continuing this vicious cycle. This in no way excuses their behavior, but it does perhaps help us understand that we need to intervene and provide education much earlier.

I believe in order to truly impact the domestic violence problem we must educate young people about dating violence. Just beginning to form relationships, teenagers often do not understand potentially dangerous behavior with their partners. Perhaps they have witnessed their friends perpetrating abuse or being victimized and

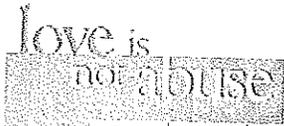
they did not have information about what to do or where to get help.

I realize it is difficult to ask educators to put one more thing on their plates. They work extremely hard and are often required to fulfill many roles. The sad truth is, if young people do not get information about dating violence prevention at school, it is not likely most will get the information at all.

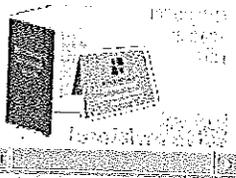
The good news is, if this legislation is passed there are curricula materials available at no cost through Liz Claiborne, Inc. and their sponsored sites, loveisnotabuse.org and loveisrespect.org. Those sites provide a free curriculum for teen dating violence prevention, as well as a facilitator's guide, handbooks for parents and teens, and information about the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline.

I believe passing this legislation is a vital first step in addressing the incidence of teen dating violence. I am hopeful that early education will be the key to ending the cycle of domestic violence. Thank you very much for your consideration of my testimony and your efforts regarding this bill.

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Since 1991 Liz Claiborne Inc. has been working to end domestic violence. Through its Love Is Not Abuse program, the company provides information and tools that men, women, children, teens and corporate executives can use to learn more about the issue and find out how they can help end this epidemic.

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