Bill S.2203/H.632, or An Act relative to sexual violence on higher education campuses, seeks to combat issues surrounding the ways in which reported cases of sexual violence are resolved on college campuses. The bill advocates for improvements in preventative services and an increase in informing people at college campuses, including faculty, students, and public safety officials about sexual violence statistics and what the process might look like in the event that they themselves or someone they know experiences sexual violence. In order keep up with the latest preventive measures and prevention services, this bill also outlines the importance of disclosing new resources available on campuses. The legislature invokes a standard of treatment similar to that which is found in off campus, making prevention education and methods of reporting concrete and mandatory.

■ The Bill
S.2203/H.632: An Act relative to sexual violence on higher education campuses

■ Elevator Speech
College students deserve the opportunity to learn in a safe environment. We’re Victoria Fils-Aime and Kayla Kurland-Davis, students at Brandeis University. As women of color in our community, we are concerned about our safety at school. Women between the ages 16 and 25 are at the highest risk of experiencing sexual violence with 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men experiencing sexually assault on college campuses. S.2203, An Act relative to sexual violence on higher education campuses, requires schools to provide bystander training, treatment options and preventative education. This bill would provide additional preventative measures such as preventative education, and mandatory bystander trainings for staff and students on higher education campus. The bill would also provide support, for victims through better means of receiving appropriate treatment. We ask you to vote Bill S.2203 out of committee.

■ Excerpts from Storybook
Expert Testimony from Betty Reilly, Assistant Director of Public Safety: “I agree this bill is important and
feasible for Brandeis to take on. I think that many of these preventative measures are already in place here on the Brandeis campus, but I think it would be a good idea [as the bill states] to have some kind of annual training of the faculty and staff on campus, especially my team who works down here at public safety.”

Expert Testimony from Krista Giuntoli, Engagement Coordinator for One Love Foundation: “I do a lot of work with informing students and individuals about the prevention of dating violence…. This bill is extremely important and will help bring awareness to a problem of sexual violence that impacts 1 in every 5 women and 1 in every 16 men.”

**Op-Ed**

**Kayla**

As I walk through campus, and eavesdrop on big tours walking around learning about Brandeis from their trained tour guide I always wonder what is not being said. They always mention the blue light, and “if you stand in one spot anywhere on campus and turn 360 degrees you can see blue help light.” I know the blue light will not stop someone from catcalling me when I walk back to my dorm, I know a blue light will not come in handy if I am touched inappropriately in a dining room, or peeped on while I am showering. So what are they really for, if not to protect me? And so what if I see one, what are the chances I will actually go over and push the button, what are the chances I will want to talk to whoever picks up on the other end and explain the details of what just happened to me? What are my options if I do say something, what are they if I don’t – why is it so complicated, why does being safe feel like a chore? Every minute at least one American is sexually assaulted. It could be a touch. It could be a comment. An ill-intentioned moment. One that could change a life. Sexual assault happens all around us. On college campuses one in five women and one in eighteen men have been victims this violence. The problem here, is that not enough is being done on higher education campuses and it seems as though the institutions themselves do not care for their students enough to ensure a safe learning environment for them. Getting an education in a safe environment should be a right, not a privilege. The question we must ask ourselves now is; do victims of sexual assault deserve the same safeguards and response regardless of where the assault happens and who perpetrates the assault? What is the well-being and safety of these students worth, and who will hear them, and who will act on it? Bill S.2203: An Act relative to sexual violence on higher education campuses, demands that Massachusetts holds it institutions accountable to report incidents, to protect individuals, and educate its students about sexual assault – because no one wants to be a victim of sexual violence. The bill lays out clear and concise protocols that institutions will abide by before, during, and following a report of sexual violence on a college campus. Faculty, staff, and students are required to partake in what the bill refers to “preventative education” which includes informative session about consent, as well as programs such as bystander training. The bill also demands that institutions do a thorough investigation when sexual violence reports have been filed as well as create accessible, reliable treatment options for its victims. It should not even be a question of cost versus benefits, because everyone can benefit and money should never be more important than the well-being of students.

**House Ways and Means Script**

Safety should not be a privilege – it is a right. One in every 5 women and 1 in every 16 men experience sexual violence on higher education campuses. There need to be preventative measures in place to protect students from being harmed in school environments. By passing this bill you we are able to support affected students who may feel lost and not know how to approach being a victim of sexual violence. As for fiscal implications, according to the Senate Ways and Means bill summary, the total cost of this legislation is estimated to be $1,000,000. Schools already receive federal funding to protect students from sexual violence, per 2014 Title IX guidelines. Overall, S.2203/H.632 would require minimal resources from both the state government and from colleges and universities. The bill takes advantage of existing infrastructure to improve sexual assault prevention and resources at institutions of higher education without requiring that schools build these resources from the ground up.

**Letter to the Legislator**

Safety should not be a privilege. Providing a safe learning environment for students is a value that I and many others share. I am aware that finding the means to support, and provide the appropriate services outlined in the bill is often a point of wariness – but I ask you to consider how students are being harmed without these preventative measures in place. At what point does the safety of students outweigh the cost of the expenses to improve my life and the lives of others. As students at Brandeis University, which is in your district, we need your help to ensure we are getting an education in a safe environment. We ask you to heed the concerns college students in your district have voiced, in advocating for creating safer education environments.

I ask myself every night: Who am I? Who do I want to be? What is my purpose? What am I meant to do in the world? I
am not the average college kid. The path that has led me to where I am today has been filled with adversity, uncertainty, and, ironically, hope. Through determination and much appreciated help from my mentors, I have overcome many obstacles.

You can’t choose your beginnings, but you can choose your future, and as Oprah Winfrey said, “Where there is no struggle, there is no strength.” The struggles I have endured have only made me stronger. When I ask myself, who am I? I remember who I am: a young, strong, black woman who has overcome all obstacles that have been set in front of me. I know who I am, and I know what I want out of life.

Brandeis University has had a huge impact on my life in terms of achieving success and finding my self-worth. I want to make the world a better place and help others, like those who helped me to get there. I have earned the right to feel safe at Brandeis University and get a college education. My industry, ingenuity, and character have proven myself worthy. I ask you to please take the time to support bill S.2203 and help other students who also want to feel safe at their college campus. I could not thank you enough for taking the time to support the bill.

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Kayla

Meeting with Sarah Berg, Director of Sexual Assault Services and Prevention at Brandeis

Meeting with Sarah became a weekly occurrence as the class continued and as the bill gained more momentum. We initially just spoke to her about the bill and what her thoughts were having been someone to help and work with survivors of sexual violence, and generally her knowledge. She continuously emphasized how important this bill would be, but she also mentioned that many students do not actually know their rights, or who to go to in the event that they experience sexual violence.

Although the Rape Crisis Center is there and accessible and open to anyone and everyone who needs the services, many students don’t really know how to navigate reporting a problem and seeking help. Sarah also became a pivotal figure for us playing a huge role in helping us put on a screening of the Hunting Ground, a film that the Coalition suggested we screen as part of the discussion of the bill as it pertains, and features Brandeis University. She too became a great sounding board for us as this class progressed. Her expertise was very helpful when it came to nailing down the statistics, and the protocols that are currently in place at Brandeis and how sexual violence claims are reported, and the disciplinary actions that follow.

Victoria

Meeting with Jacob Edelman, Brandeis University Student Union President and previous student advocate for the bill

Kayla and I reached out to Jacob expressing our passion for the bill, and he was very enthusiastic about meeting with us. This same enthusiasm was present when we met him in person. Jacob had worked on this bill when he was taken this same exact course and also worked in Representative Farley-Bouvier’s office. Before starting our journey, I wanted to learn the reasons why the legislation has not passed prior times in order for us to take a different approach this time around.

According to Jacob, one of the biggest challenges for representatives is worrying about how to sell the legislation to their constituents who were already having a hard time putting their children through college. We asked Jacob for tips on successful advocacy tactics. He said that promoting stories of successful cases from other states would be a good strategy. In addition, gathering personal narratives and bringing those individuals to the representatives and senators and to the hearings to testify at the hearing would evoke emotion and be powerful. Also, according to Jacob, there a lag time after the hearing and before voting, which is one of the most crucial times because representatives and senators need to constantly be reminded and pushed to vote for the legislation from their constituents.

■ Updates

As of November 6, 2017, the bill has been read and referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

For more information

View the bill:
malegislature.gov/Bills/190/S2203

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