

Voices
for Vermont's Children



Respectfully submitted to the Vermont House Committee on Judiciary
By Amy Rose, Policy Associate, Voices for Vermont's Children
February 14, 2023

Voices deeply appreciates the opportunity to testify today. I plan to keep my testimony brief. Voices did not participate in the Committee for Protecting Students from Sexual Exploitation but I have had the opportunity to read the report. I appreciate the work that went into the report and was impressed with the direct quotes from survivors. Centering survivors in restructuring our policies and practices redistributes power and has the potential to heal past wrongs while creating meaningful and visionary changes that may not be possible without their inclusion.

Voices supports the intent of H.173. We know that some adults who've abused children manipulate those children in order to slowly overcome natural boundaries. Building trust in order to do harm violates children in complex ways. We also understand that the majority of adults who give a child extra time and attention are motivated by a genuine wish to help the child. We see the need to minimize the risk of harm while avoiding the potential to alienate adults who serve a protective role through healthy relationships. We think H.173 does just that. We appreciate the qualifiers added to the definition of manipulation as this bill focuses on conditioning children for sexual abuse.

We agree that the previous term "grooming" has been misused and therefore is not appropriate in this statute. We support the need to offer more opportunities for intervention when adult connections with children are motivated by inappropriate and harmful sexual intent. We agree that expanding this work beyond the boundaries of school relationships is appropriate and necessary.

We do have a couple questions and/or recommendations for your Committee to consider going forward.

- We noticed that the supporting statute in the Committee for Protecting Students from Sexual Exploitation report (13 V.S.A. § 2828) has a statute of limitations of 40 years. This may have already shifted with the passage of [Act 37](#) in 2019. In general, we recommend eliminating statute of limitations for abuse towards children and youth.
- Research shows that [specialized treatment for juveniles](#) who sexually offend leads to reductions in both sexual and nonsexual recidivism. Voices supports following best practices for youth who may present manipulating behaviors intended to facilitate sexual contact with a child.

Overall, we are grateful for the time and energy that went into this bill and the work of this Committee.

Many thanks again for your time and consideration.