



HB 1560: High school students; development of Title IX and sexual harassment prevention training modules

Patron: Delegate Watts

Committee Referral: House K-12 Committee

Position: Strong Support

Summary:

Requires the Department of Education, in conjunction with organizations that serve sexual harassment victims, to develop culturally appropriate, age-appropriate, and trauma-informed Title IX and sexual harassment prevention training modules that cover consent, Title IX rights, and preventing and reporting sexual harassment for students in high school. School boards are required to set aside time during the first 31 days of the start of each school year for students to complete such training modules, while the Department of Education is required to update the modules each year to ensure continued compliance with state and federal laws. Finally, school boards are required to ensure that high school students are aware of any school counseling resources before completing the modules.

The bill provides an opt-out for parents and students who are over the age of 18.

Background:

Sexual harassment is a pervasive problem in secondary schools across the Commonwealth. According to the [American Association of University Women](#), nearly half of secondary schools students reported facing sexual harassment. Similarly, the [Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey](#) found that 51% of girls and 29% of boys reported at least one form of sexual harassment in the past 12 months.

Unfortunately, the crisis is compounded by a lack of awareness around Title IX protections and reporting procedures. Unlike colleges, who often require their students to complete sexual harassment modules, students in secondary schools learn little to no information on sexual harassment reporting options. While it is difficult to quantify the scope of this issue, given that there is [no singular data set that provides a comprehensive overview of crime](#), polling from the [Washington Post](#) has suggested that two-thirds of people say they know “not much” or “nothing at all” about Title IX protections. The lack of awareness around Title IX harms students, given that school employees may be [more hostile or less receptive in cases of sexual harassment](#) compared to professional Title IX coordinators and that school systems have [chronically underreported sexual harassment](#).

Moreover, the vast majority of students report learning little information about consent. A [study](#) by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, for example, suggests that vast swatches of the student body have never had conversations about consent with educators. Though Family Life and Education (FLE) curricula may sometimes cover consent and sexual harassment, these discussions are often inadequate, given that FLE instruction is often focused on other key issues, including substance abuse, abstinence, contraceptives, and familial relationships, and occurs later in the year.