

February 20, 2015

Senator Lesil McGuire
Alaska State Senate
State Capitol Room 121
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator McGuire,

My name is Cindy Moore. I have lived in Alaska for 30 years and raised three daughters here. I am seeking your help to introduce legislation making teen dating violence education mandatory curriculum in grades 7-12. Despite its alarmingly high incidence and proven negative impact on the healthy development and education of our youth, Alaska law does not mandate schools to address dating abuse. The fact is, patterns of dating violence that start early escalate over time and carry over into adult relationships. As this cycle of violence continues, it deteriorates the fabric of our families and communities. Our state is a perfect example of this; our shockingly high rate of domestic abuse, rape, and murder prove that we need to take immediate action to change the social norms about the acceptability of domestic violence. Now is the time for us to protect our children. Now is the time to stop the violence.

Teen dating violence has affected my family in a profound and life changing way. About 6:00 am on June 26, 2014, my husband, pale and barley able to speak, awakened me. His hands were shaking and in an almost inaudible whisper he said, "Cindy, you need to come downstairs right now!" At the bottom of the stairs, stood two uniformed APD officers, who somberly broke horrifying news; that our daughter Breanna had been killed, by a single gunshot wound to the head, at the hands of her boyfriend.

Since that fateful day, our lives have been forever changed and with so many unanswered questions. How could this have happened to such a strong, beautiful, and independent young woman? Why didn't she say something about the continuing abuse we later discovered? Why did she stay? Why did she not seek help? As parents, why did we not see the signs? What I am learning, is that these are all questions that can and need be answered. I am hoping that through the loss of my daughter, that I can inspire the leaders of our state to spare our young people the pain and lasting detrimental effects of abuse. You have the power to change this! Please fight for every young person in our state. Doing nothing is unacceptable, as it puts our children at increased risk of substance abuse, depression, poor academic performance, suicide, future violence and death.

Please think of your own daughters & sons, granddaughters & grandsons, nieces & nephews; as I share with you some staggering national statistics on teen dating violence:

- Girls and young women between 16-24 are four times more likely than the general population to be victims of partner violence.
- Dating violence is the leading cause of injury to women.
- An intimate partner committed 22% of all homicides against females 16-19.
- 80% of girls who have been physically abused in their intimate relationships continue to date their abusers.
- 58% of rape survivors report being raped between the ages of 12-24.
- 50% of all reported date rapes occur among teenagers.
- Violent behavior normally begins between the ages of 12-18.
- One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence.

- 40% of teenage girls ages 14-17 say they know someone their age that has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.
- One in 10 high school students has been purposefully hit, slapped or physically hurt by a boyfriend.
- 80% of teens that had been in an abusive relationship turned to a friend for help, not their parents or an authority figure.
- The severity of intimate partner violence is often greater in cases where the pattern of abuse was established in adolescence.
- About 72% of eight and ninth graders are “dating”.
- 81% of parents either believe teen-dating violence is not an issue or admit they don’t know if it’s an issue.
- Violent relationships in adolescence can have serious ramifications by putting the victims at higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior and further domestic violence.
- Being physically or sexually abused makes teen girl six times more likely to become pregnant and twice as likely to get a sexually transmitted infection.
- 50% of youth who have been victims of both dating violence and rape attempt suicide, compared to 12.5% of non-abused girls and 5.4% of non-abused boys.

“If the numbers we see in domestic violence were applied to terrorism or gang violence, the entire country would be up in arms, and it would be the lead story on the news every night.”

Former Rep. Mark Green, Wisconsin

The appalling statistics here in Alaska are proof we desperately need to shift our focus to prevention; because how our state is currently handling domestic violence awareness is not working! This is clearly shown by the statistics:

- Alaska most dangerous state in America. Alaska has replaced Tennessee as the most dangerous state in the United States in 2015. Based on FBI’s four major violent crime categories: murder, aggravated assault, robbery, and incidents of forcible rape.
- Anchorage and Fairbanks are #2 and #3 on a Forbes list of the nation's most dangerous cities for women.
- Alaska leads the nation in rapes per capita - three times national average.
- Alaska has the nation's highest rate of women murdered by men - two times the national average.
- Alaska also has the highest rate of suicide per capita in the country.
- UAA Justice Center survey concluded that almost 59% of women in Alaska had experienced physical violence, threats of it, or sexual violence from a partner at some point in their lives.

My daughter Breanna is now one of these statistics. She was an amazing, daughter, sister, auntie, and friend to so many. She was a student in the Japanese Immersion Program, Dimond High graduate & student at UAA. She was an animal lover who cherished her French bulldog, Edmund, and her chameleon, Cami, and even made time to volunteer at Adopt-A-Cat once a week. No one made an animal feel more loved than she did, she treated everyone of them like her best friend. Breanna was also a true Alaskan girl who could hunt, fish, ride dirt bike, jet ski, four-wheel, wakeboard, snowmachine, and snowboard better than most guys. She also enjoyed hiking, camping, cooking, singing, biking, ice-skating, dancing, riding horses and traveling – she loved life! She was an athlete; played baseball, soccer, metaled in swimming while on the Arctic Swim Team. In the 2007 City Track & Field Championships, she took 1st place in the 200M sprint. Breanna played Varsity volleyball, winning the State Championship in 2010, and Lettering her senior year. She also played comp club volleyball for five years. She had a beautiful voice and sang publically at local restaurants and sang the National Anthem at the Anchorage Downtown Market, Anchorage Bucs Baseball game & Senior Night at Dimond High School. She played the flute with the prestigious Arctic Wind Junior Youth Choir and performed at various public venues. These were just a few of her accomplishments,

activities and hobbies she was involved with over the years...there are so many more. Her first job at 16 was at Acai Alaska. She also worked at Suite 100 as a seating hostess, Nordstrom as a sales associate, a union flagger for Prus Construction, and dental hygienist assistant at Health Centered Dentistry.

Breanna was such a motivated and loved employee, her boss informed her that he was going to promote her and start training her as a dentist's assistant. She was so proud and excited. She was financially responsible, had money in her savings account, paid her credit card on time and had a credit score of nearly 800. One month before she was killed, she bought her first new car. A couple of months before her death, she came to me and told me she finally decided on a career, she wanted to be a doctor. Breanna researched the classes she needed to take and was planning on registering for them, but never had the chance. She was one of the most motivated, funny and happy people I have ever known. I was truly blessed to be her mother for the short 20 years she was in my life. Breanna never got to be the dentists' assistant or a doctor. She didn't get to move into her first apartment, see her second niece come into this world, celebrate her 21st birthday, graduate college, get married or have children. She was robbed of those life experiences. She is now a crime statistic, a pile of ashes in an urn, a memory. Let neither Breanna's life, nor the lives of so many other innocent Alaskan women be swept under the rug, let's remember their lives and use their stories as a tool to implement change.

I propose that Teen Dating Violence Education legislation be introduced now and for it to be called Bree's Law - after a beautiful young Alaskan woman who inspired so many during her short life. Through *Bree's Law*, Breanna can continue to inspire and protect young women in the state she so loved.

"It really is the secret evil that is rotting us from the inside. It is something we don't talk about too much. It is done in the secrecy and privacy of homes." Former Governor Parnell said of the epidemic of sexual and domestic violence in Alaska.

I realize that many may feel we cannot mandate another topic be taught in our schools, but given the statistics here in our state; we cannot afford not to teach teen dating violence awareness. One study found that 75 percent of teens that took a school course on teen dating violence said it helped them learn about the signs of abusive relationships. Since teens spend more time in school than at home with their parents, Schools and school-based curriculum have a profound ability to influence teens during their formative years when they are developing behaviorally and emotionally. Teachers are able to address these issues directly with teens, promote positive alternatives to violence, and address gender-based beliefs that can lead to violence.

In a study by the Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk, "The Need for School-Based Teen Dating Violence Prevention", it states, "Teen dating violence is a public health priority. It is widespread, prevalent, and negatively affects adolescents' mental, physical, and social health. Thus, we are in critical need of programs aimed at preventing dating violence and promoting healthy relationship skills. Not only will this improve the health and quality of life of children and adolescents, it has the potential to curb the prevalence of adult domestic violence. We firmly believe that the benefits of addressing dating violence (e.g., improved health) will result in improved academic performance and reduced truancy. The costs of implementing a prevention program is justified given the scope of teen dating violence, potential improvements in adolescent health outcomes, decreased need for youth to utilize services in the future (e.g., medical, behavioral, criminal justice), and the perceived need and appropriateness among educators for school-based prevention programs."

The state of Rhode Island serves as an excellent model with regard to incorporating a teen dating violence curriculum into its schools. In 2007, Rhode Island enacted the Lindsay Ann Burke Act, named in honor of a young woman who was murdered by her boyfriend after a two-year struggle in an

abusive relationship. The Act requires that all school districts in Rhode Island implement a curriculum and policy on teen dating violence, and teach that curriculum every year, from 7th -12th grades. Since the passage of the Lindsay Ann Burke Act, physical teen dating violence rates have decreased almost in half, from 14% in 2007 to 8.4% in 2013. Details of the Act are on the State of Rhode Island General Assembly website. Numerous other states have since adopted similar laws, all of which can be found on the National Conference of State Legislatures website. Delaware, Florida, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Illinois, Ohio, Virginia, Texas, Georgia, Indiana, Arizona, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Maryland, Louisiana, Colorado, Washington, and Connecticut (in addition to Rhode Island) have laws that urge or require school boards to develop curriculum on teen dating violence. Currently, California, Michigan, New York, North Carolina have pending legislation.

Curriculum resources are readily available to train school staff:

- The Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund has produced a school staff training DVD of their workshop through which thousands of Rhode Island teachers have been trained. Please visit www.labmf.org for more information about their workshops and the DVE.
- Also, the CDC has a free on-line training for school staff.
- In addition, federal “Safe & Drug Free Schools” money can be used to purchase dating violence curriculum materials.

There is no need to start from scratch when developing a model teen dating violence policy, The Rhode Island Department of Education's "Guide to Preventing Bullying, Teen Dating Violence, and Sexual Violence in Rhode Island Schools" can be used as a starting point. This can be found on their website @ http://www.thriveri.org/documents/guide_bullying_tdvsv_amended2012.pdf.

To save teachers time, this could be setup as an online class. That way there is no cost other than the setup and software. There could be ten ten-minute mini-lessons with worksheets and a Teacher’s Manual. The students can take one, ten-minute mini-class every week. If the teachers prefer, it can be totally homework because it’s online. It can also be “Open Entry/Open Exit,” so the students can start the online class anytime and finish at anytime.

In a national effort to raise awareness about abuse in the teen and 20-something relationships, President, Barack Obama, made a proclamation declaring February – **National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month**. On 10/16/2013, Bill H.R.3297 was introduced in the U.S. House: Teen Dating Violence Education Act of 2013 - Amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to require the inclusion of information regarding the legal rights available to teenage victims of dating violence in the education programs created with grants to combat the impact on students of domestic violence.

In the last year, we have seen the media and entertainment taking a stand against domestic violence:

- The top sports story of 2014 was NFL football player Ray Rice punching and knocking out his fiancé in an elevator.
- The new “No More” ads featuring more than 40 celebrities, has created public awareness focused on ending domestic violence and sexual assault.
- One of the most talked about commercial during this years Super Bowl was the “No More: Listen” PSA which featured a victim of Domestic Violence calling 911 and using the tactic of acting like she was ordering a pizza to get help, because her abuser was still in the house (This ad was based on a real 911 call).
- During the 2015 Grammys two weeks ago, President, Barack Obama called on musicians and music fans alike to pledge to stop domestic violence. He said, "It's not OK and it has to stop." Also, Brooke Axtell, shared her stirring experience as a survivor of domestic violence and urged others to recognize their worth and seek help to save themselves.

These PSA's are important, because public service announcements are creating awareness and sparking discussion about domestic violence, but TV ads are not going to cure this national epidemic, this Alaska epidemic. Amidst this public awareness, NOW is the time for Alaska to educate our youth to give them the tools they need to have healthy relationships and productive futures. If we don't stop this while they are young, the cycle of violence will continue.

"It is the opinion of the subcommittee that we need greater involvement of schools and the educational system in our drive to address teen dating violence." Teen Dating Violence: Next Steps in our National Response, A Report on Teen Dating Violence of the U.S. Justice Department

With Alaska facing serious budgetary constraints, it is an opportune time for policymakers to consider ways to reduce spending. Can implementing teen dating violence education in our schools save the state money?

- A 2007 CDC study on the effectiveness of universal school-based programs on the prevention of violence and reckless behavior, analyzed bullying and dating violence prevention programs that met certain criteria, and found that for every \$1 spent on prevention, over \$3 were saved in health care and criminal justice costs per youth.
- In the Alaska, the average cost to hold one young person in a juvenile detention facility is an average of \$216,079 per year. The average cost to send one young person through a juvenile treatment program is \$237,513 per year. Since teen-dating violence has a high rate of reoccurring in adulthood as domestic violence, there is future additional cost savings of educating our youth to prevent adult domestic violence.
- According to a 2010 cost-benefit analysis of the Domestic Violence Program's, Co-Location Project, conducted by graduate students at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work; domestic violence costs society approximately \$9,454 per victim per year in the state of Colorado. This cost of domestic violence was derived from calls to law enforcement, court expenses, domestic violence related homicide investigations, offender treatment services, medical, and reduced work productivity.
- What cost do we put on saving an innocent human life; from saving a family from the heartache and tragedy of losing a loved one to dating violence? If we save one life – one family from this fate – the return? What value do you put on your child?

If we act to educate our young people and engage them in conversations about healthy relationships, rather than react to unhealthy ones later on, we can stop teen dating violence before it starts. When a healthy cycle is learned, that knowledge is then shared with friends, family and community. We cannot ask our young women and men to recognize and stop the violence within their relationships without assistance from both the legal and educational systems. A student who participated in the domestic violence class at SELF High School in Irvine, California, clearly illustrated this point when she said, "If I hadn't taken the class, I wouldn't have known I was in an abusive relationship. I thought it was normal." Through education, knowledge about dating violence and skills will empower teens to help themselves and others. Prevention holds the promise of keeping future generations of women and children safe from violence.

This is what happens when we educate teens, school staff & parents about teen dating violence in a safe school environment:

- They will talk openly about this topic, removing the shame and stigma that now exists.
- It helps victims to come forward and seek help.
- It gives knowledge of where to seek help.
- It gives the knowledge and skills to help each other.
- It gives power to recognize an abusive relationship.
- It teaches tools to build healthy relationships.
- It helps parents reinforce this information at home and watch for signs of unhealthy relationships.

- It helps abusers learn about their destructive behavior and seek to change.
- It save lives!

"It's on us, all of us, to create a culture where violence isn't tolerated, where survivors are supported and where all our young people, men and women, can go as far as their talents and their dreams will take them." President Barack Obama addressing domestic violence

I wish teen dating violence awareness had been mandatory curriculum for my daughter, Breanna Moore, who was murdered by her boyfriend on June 26, 2014. She was barely 20 years old. If she knew what signs and patterns to look for, that it's ok to talk about domestic violence, and where to go for help, she might still be alive today. <https://www.facebook.com/balloons4bree>

As a mother who has lost a daughter to teen dating violence, I hope to open the eyes of others– this is a preventable epidemic! Together through legislation you put fourth, we can bring about change to help stop teen dating violence and domestic violence in our state – in our communities – in our homes.

Thank you so much for your time and attention to this imperative issue. I am planning to come to Juneau to meet with you and speak with other legislators regarding my proposal of *Bree's Law*. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

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