

# Re: Support for HF 104 and SF 2200

My name is Natalina Slaughter and I live in Plymouth. I am offering my unique perspective to the Judiciary Committee to provide context and support for bill HF 104 and SF 2200. This would allow restorative justice providers to have the same confidentiality rules as therapists and other providers. This would allow for a new pathway for healing for survivors. I am a survivor of sexual abuse. I also am a mental health therapist with experience treating both survivors and perpetrators of sexual violence. I would like to stress to you a few key things about sexual violence that are relevant to this legislation. The first is that sexual violence, it's complicated. And complicated problems do not improve with simple, blanket solutions. For many people, going through the traditional criminal justice path is helpful and healing. However, for many others, myself included, it simply does not offer a sense of healing or justice. Some of this is due to failures of individuals and systems to provide trauma informed care. In addition, the justice system is often poorly suited to address the survivor's largest concerns. In the aftermath of my assault, I wanted to understand what happened to me and why. Like many survivors, my memory of the assault is poor. Poor memory of the event is a PTSD symptom. I wanted to ask questions about the things I didn't remember, I wanted to have enough knowledge to feel safe again. Unfortunately, there's no pathway for this.

Secondly, it is essential to state that my assailant is a human being. Viewing sex offenders as solely monsters or subhuman can contribute to the survivor blaming themselves or denying the abuse. Because I had empathy for my abuser, it was difficult to fully accept what he was doing to me was wrong. Like many survivors, I found a million ways to blame myself because I didn't think an otherwise normal person could be a rapist or abuser. That probably feels uncomfortable to read and I feel the need to stress that I am not saying that to protect him. He did something evil to me and deserves a consequence. But why not a consequence that also empowers the survivor? That let's the survivor specifically pursue what is most important to them? Bill HF 104 and SF 2200 would create an ability for survivors to experience healing in a way that can incorporate and work alongside existing systems. Sex offender treatment programs are still a valuable resource in reducing risk, and they exist both within our correctional system and in outpatient clients. Connecting existing resources to improve the health and wellbeing of survivors, maybe there is some benefit in simplicity.

Now the third thing is perhaps the most difficult leap. I understand this may be difficult to believe because it goes against our general cultural understanding of sex offenders. If it is too far of a reach, I ask that you still consider the possibility that this could be true. Not everyone who has sexually offended is destined to continue offending or to causing harm to the person they victimized. And if we can accept that's the case, isn't that the best possible option? The survivor can feel free and safe again, the government does not have to invest significant funds towards housing and caring for them, and the person can grow and learn from their bad choices. I would have found so much more healing through restorative justice, where I could have gotten my questions answered and we both could have accessed deeply needed resources.

-Natalina Slaughter