



**Empowering Youth to End
Domestic Violence**

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Testimony before the
District of Columbia Council
Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary

on the

“IntraFamily Offenses Act of 2007”
Bill 17-0055

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Written Testimony of:

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My name is Simone Wainwright, and I am 16. I am a rising senior at Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School in Washington, D.C. I spoke to the City Council last year about teen dating violence and the need for services in the District. I am currently interning with Break the Cycle. I have been working with this organization since last year. I really support what Break the Cycle stands for. Being a teenager in D.C., I see the need for the services they provide. I support the passage of the IntraFamily Offenses Act of 2007.

In my neighborhood, I've seen violent behavior among teenagers. Normally, I think relationship violence happens behind closed doors. But sometimes it does spill out into public areas. I see pushing and grabbing between couples sometimes. Normally it is the male being violent, but not always.

In my high school, I see a lot of verbal dating abuse. For example, a guy might tell his girlfriend "I don't need you; I can get a girl better than you." I think a lot of the relationship abuse that occurs in my high school is limited to emotional abuse because the kids are afraid of getting in trouble if they act out violently.

In general, I don't think that teenagers my age know where to go for help. Normally, I think they would tell their friends, if anyone, about the abuse. Their friends usually give them advice, but don't really know what to do. They might tell you to stay away from the abuser, but wouldn't know someplace to go for help. This is because teens don't feel like they have rights and services that are available to them.

If the situation was happening to an older person, you might recommend a restraining order. But we don't think that those options are available to us. To get a restraining order you have to tell your parents, and many teens don't want to do that. We feel like parents won't understand and will nag and just ask tons of questions when all you want to do is get rid of the situation and get out of the relationship. So a lot of kids my age, instead of telling their parents, will just do nothing and hope that the situation goes away. The problem is that it's easier said than done to get out of an abusive relationship. In most of the abusive relationships that I see, it takes a long time and is really hard to get out of the situation.

I think that if teens had more options open to them, like restraining orders without parental consent, it would be easier. We wouldn't feel like we don't have any options, and we wouldn't feel so trapped. Right now we feel as though we can't do anything about the situation because we're not 18.

If teens knew about more organizations like Break the Cycle, they would use them or recommend them to their friends if they should need help. This would also help us not feel as trapped, because these services could help us and explain our options.

We have a choice about having relationships, and we want choices about how to get help to get out of unhealthy ones. We obviously don't know that a relationship will be abusive when it starts, and by the time it's abusive, we don't know what to do. Many

people don't understand because they have never been in the situation. Someone may think that they would just leave if their boyfriend or girlfriend became abusive, but you never know until you experience the situation yourself.

Here are some things that DC teens between the ages of 14 and 17 said when they were asked about it at a Break the Cycle focus group in April of this year:

One teen boy said "you wouldn't want your family to know that you're getting beat, especially because people will ask 'why are you letting him do this to you' and they think that you're stronger and that you can get out of it and you don't want to be embarrassed by your family and have them look at you like your weak or anything."

One girl emphasized the idea of the parents' views on the relationship, she said "most parents don't agree with teen dating, and they don't want their teens to be going out on dates, so we can't tell them."

Others said that "sometimes the victim might think that their parents won't believe them because they don't think their child would be with someone like that" and that "with parents, especially if your mother or your father is being abused you might not feel comfortable telling them."

Teens under 18 have relationships just like those over 18. It's not fair that we have to go through so much more to get help for getting out of unhealthy relationships. The day you turn 18, it's not like you're magically mature and can make good decisions that people under 18 can't make. Maturity doesn't necessarily come with age.

Thank you for provided me with this opportunity to testify before the District of Columbia Council on this important issue. I hope you will help to solve this problem to protect young people in the District.