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William N Brownsberger  
Senate Chair  
Special Commission to Reduce  
The Recidivism of Sex Offenders

October 31, 2015

Dear Chairman Brownsberger:

I had the privilege of presenting to the Special Commission to Reduce the Recidivism of Sex Offenders on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The goals of my presentation, “Community Based Prevention”, were to provide an overview of sexual violence prevention, describe a comprehensive approach, provide examples of evidence-informed strategies, and to allow time for discussion of challenges and implications for the Commission.

The Massachusetts Sexual Violence Prevention Plan<sup>i</sup> defines sexual violence as any sexual activity where consent is not obtained or freely given. It includes a broad continuum of violent and abusive behaviors including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and non-contact sexual abuse such as verbal and cyber-harassment. Experiences of sexual violence are prevalent in Massachusetts and impact men, women, and transgender survivors. National and local data reflect that most survivors, regardless of gender, know their assailants. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) uses the socio-ecological model to understand risk and protective factors for the primary prevention of sexual violence at the individual, relational, community, and societal levels.<sup>ii</sup> Primary prevention focuses on the prevention of first time sexual offenses. A **comprehensive approach** to sexual violence prevention includes interventions before violence has occurred (primary prevention) as well as the immediate responses to violence (secondary prevention), and long-term and systemic responses (tertiary prevention).

Two examples of evidence-informed approaches are Environmental Interventions and Bystander Skills Training:

- Environmental Interventions, such as the “Shifting Boundaries” intervention researched by Nan Stein in New York City public middle schools, combined classroom lessons with building interventions.<sup>iii</sup> The research found that schools that used both, or only the building interventions, saw much lower rates of sexual and physical violence than schools that only used classroom lessons. The intervention called for creating changes in the environment based on information gathered from students mapping safe places in the school. They also trained students and staff to use the “Respecting Boundaries Agreement” when incidents occurred between students.

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- Bystander Skills training has been shown to increase individuals' ability to intervene in situations before sexual violence occurs.<sup>iv</sup> Bystander Intervention training (Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 2009) is successfully being used all over the country and in programs like Green Dot and Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP).

Finally, there are many challenges to prevention work, most notably, the lack of a sustainable funding stream. Rape Crisis Centers in the Commonwealth receive Federal monies, Rape Prevention Education (RPE) funding, that is distributed by the Department of Public Health, however this funding does not cover the demand from communities for culturally relevant, evidence-based programming done to scale. To truly prevent sexual violence we must shift the culture, which requires sustained efforts over the long-term, anything else is a band-aid.

Sincerely,

Steph Trilling, LCSW  
Manager of Community Awareness and Prevention Services

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<sup>i</sup> MA Department of Public Health. 2009. Massachusetts Sexual Violence Prevention Plan 2009-2016. Boston.. <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/com-health/violence/ma-has-plan.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> CDC. (2015, February 10). *Risk and Protective Factors*. Retrieved October 31, 2015 from Sexual Violence: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Taylor, Bruce G., Nan D. Stein, Elizabeth A. Mumford, and Daniel Woods. 2013. "Shifting Boundaries: An Experimental Evaluation of a Dating Violence Prevention Program in Middle Schools." *Prevention Science* 14(1):64–76.

<sup>iv</sup> Berkowitz, A. D. (2009). *Response ability: A complete guide to bystander intervention*. Chicago, IL: Beck & Co