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Governor Wolf Unveils New “It’s On Us PA” Legislation to Combat Campus Sexual Assaults

Harrisburg, PA – Building on his successful It’s On Us PA initiative, Governor Tom Wolf today unveiled a four-bill package that will further strengthen protections for students and combat sexual assaults on campuses. The governor has made Pennsylvania a national leader in addressing sexual violence and changing the culture on campuses across the state.

“We have made a lot of progress in combatting sexual violence and harassment in schools, but we need to do more to ensure all of our students are safe,” said Gov. Wolf. “These four legislative proposals are the next step to preventing assaults and violence and ensuring victims get the help they deserve.

“I commend the legislators joining me in this fight and urge the leadership in the General Assembly to quickly take this legislation up for a vote and send it to my desk.”

The governor was joined at a capitol news conference by students, legislators and the national leader of It’s On Us, a movement fighting against sexual assault on college campuses for both men and women.

The governor’s four-bill package would:

Enact a 'yes means yes' law that requires all postsecondary institutions to have policies with clear standards of what is and is not consent. California, Connecticut, Illinois, Minnesota and New York have similar laws to protect both partners by ensuring a mutual understanding. Schools also must have sexual violence awareness programs and agreements with local rape crisis centers and domestic violence programs so survivors get the academic, living and other accommodations that can help them stay in school. (SB 730, sponsored by Sen. Amanda Cappelletti and HB 1489, sponsored by Rep. Brian Sims)

“It is imperative that we take steps to prevent sexual violence on campuses and more fully support the victims when it does happen,” said Sen. Amanda Cappelletti. “The bill that I am introducing with Senators Muth and Collett provides clear standards of what consent is, and is

not, and would ensure students know where they can access resources in the event of an assault by requiring agreements with local rape crisis centers and domestic violence programs. I'm glad we are working together to comprehensively support the students of Pennsylvania."

"Not only do we need to greatly increase the support for survivors of sexual assault, we need comprehensive and inclusive education on consent," said Rep. Brian Sims. "Educating kids before they arrive on college campuses is the number one way that we can reduce the instances of sexual violence. The children, young people and citizens of Pennsylvania deserve it."

Ari Fromm, a PA State Director for the Every Voice Coalition and University of Pennsylvania student added, "All too often, student survivors are left on their own to figure out what they need, to help themselves heal through trauma while also managing their education and everything else that college entails. This is the first step to addressing survivor dropout. This bill is a chance to take action."

Strengthen protections for victims of on-campus crime by requiring the schools to inform victims of their rights and services and to provide protective accommodations or protective measures, if requested by the victim. (SB 909, sponsored by Sen. Steve Santarsiero and HB 1699, sponsored by Rep. Karen Boback)

"Sexual assault and domestic violence remain a problem on college campuses," said Sen. Steve Santarsiero. "Our institutions of higher education have both the opportunity and responsibility to provide support and reasonable accommodations to students who have been the victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. My legislation, Senate Bill 909, will require colleges and universities to inform students of the rights, accommodations, and protective measures available to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence."

"As a former educator and adjunct professor, this is an extremely important issue," said Rep. Karen Boback. "I joined the administration with the 'It's on Us' campaign by introducing legislation to extend protections for victims of crime on college campuses across our Commonwealth. I look forward to seeing this legislation move forward, as October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month as well."

Teach middle and high school students to know and prevent dating violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking. While the Crime Victims Act outlines requirements for expelling a student for an assault on school grounds, this bill requires schools to provide preventative education for students in grades 7-12. This will help students to recognize and stop harmful and dangerous behaviors, relationships and situations, and better prepare young people before they arrive on college campuses. (SB 785, sponsored by Sen. Judith Schwank and HB 1490, sponsored by Rep. Jessica Benham)

"Pennsylvania has had success working with colleges and universities to establish sexual violence reporting systems that ensure all students feel comfortable coming forward," said Sen. Judy Schwank. "However, we need to continue this work and start addressing this issue before students reach college campuses. SB 785 would require schools to teach 7th through 12th grade students to identify and prevent dating violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and stalking to help equip young people with these important skills. These measures are proactive and will allow Pennsylvania to continue to make progress on this issue."

"It's on all of us to make sure that every student, regardless of who they are, feels safe and protected on their campus, as well as across the Commonwealth, and has the resources and support they need to succeed," said Rep. Jessica Benham.

Create a task force to study sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking in grades 6-12 and postsecondary institutions. The Joint State Government Commission would conduct the study to better understand student experiences and improve response efforts. (SR 122, sponsored by Sen. Vince Hughes and HR 108, sponsored by Rep. Carol Hill-Evans)

"The adoption of the 'It's on Us' campaign has been a bright spot for combatting sexual assault and relationship violence at postsecondary institutions across the Commonwealth," said Sen. Vincent Hughes. "Unfortunately, the lack of uniform standards has led to an uneven and inconsistent response among institutions of higher education. The General Assembly needs to adopt Senate Resolution 122 so that we may improve performance and establish consistent responses to sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking."

"As a society we must understand the physical, mental, and emotional toll the trauma of sexual assault has on each individual," said Rep. Carol Hill-Evans. "That is why in June I introduced HR 108, which directs the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a study on the impact of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking on Commonwealth students enrolled in grades 6 through 12 and beyond. We simply must begin having these discussions earlier in our students' educational experience with the hope of having a positive impact as they transition to postsecondary institutions and through life. Thank you to Governor Wolf for his statewide initiative following the national It's On Us campaign to involve everyone in preventing sexual assault."

The first several weeks of the fall semester is commonly referred to as the "Red Zone" when sexual assault increases, especially among freshman women.

According to the [National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#) (NISVS) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are more than 418,000 victims of sexual violence under age 18 in Pennsylvania. Nationwide, one in three female victims experience rape between the ages of 11 and 17 and one in four male victims experiencing rape before the age of 10.

"I am proud to stand here today with Governor Wolf, Pennsylvanian Students, and the legislators who will carry these bills in the Pennsylvania Legislature," said Tracey Vitchers, executive director, It's On Us. "These bills would strengthen the rights of students, and require colleges and universities, as well as K-12 schools across the commonwealth to do better by our youth and young adults. By passing these critical pieces of legislation we will make strides to prevent sexual assault and protect the rights of student survivors across the commonwealth."

"The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape is grateful to join Governor Wolf in support of survivors of campus sexual assault. The It's On Us legislative package will help strengthen sexual assault prevention and response on college campuses throughout the state and ensure students impacted by sexual assault and abuse have access to the support of rape crisis centers," said Karen Baker, CEO, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape.

Protecting students from violence and shifting to prevention strategies has been a priority for Gov. Wolf. After taking office the governor launched It's On Us PA, the nation's first statewide campaign to prevent assaults on campus.

In 2019, the governor signed two major laws from his It's On Us campaign. The laws require colleges to provide an anonymous online option for students to report sexual assaults and protection for students reporting sexual assault from being disciplined for violating school drug, alcohol or other policies.

The governor has also provided \$5 million in It's On Us grants to 190 public and private post-secondary schools to help change the culture on campus. The Department of Education is [accepting applications for grants up to \\$30,000 through October 20, 2021.](#)

Governor Wolf invites everyone to take the [It's On Us PA pledge](#) and play a role in ending sexual assault.

[It's On Us](#) is a national initiative started by former President Barack Obama and then-Vice-President Joe Biden to raise awareness about sexual assault; teaching participants that assault includes non-consensual sex, advising them on how to identify dangerous situations, empowering them to intervene, and urging them to create an environment of support for victims and survivors.

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