To all the survivors sitting in this chamber, and listening in the Gallery or online - you are the profile of strength, resilience, and hope. Thank you for your meaningful contributions to our state - I am inspired by you. This is my story of survivorship which I label with a \*\*trigger warning\*\* for your care, and that I share today in hopes of also making a meaningful contribution to our state in support of SB19-007.

In 2004, I was drugged and gang raped by my boyfriend and his fraternity. I remember my boyfriend’s long hair sweeping across my face as he thrust himself into my paralyzed, lifeless body. The sensation tickled my nose and stimulated a brief moment of awareness amidst my drug-induced paralysis. Confused and unable to move or talk, I remember feeling the crushing weight of my rapist on top of me, the sound of his labored breathing, and the taste of my own silent, salty tears as they trickled down my cheeks and into the corners of my mouth. Horrified, I tried to divert my eyes away from him, my only chance at escape, and that was the moment I caught sight of the others. Silhouettes leering in the soft glow of an outside street light shining through his bedroom window, they were watching. They were waiting their turns; turns which they undoubtedly took with impunity.

After that night my grades began to suffer. I suffered serious health issues as a result of the gang rape and soon after developed an eating disorder. I quit the Division 1 swim team for which I had been awarded a partial scholarship and began drinking and abusing substances on an almost daily basis to cope with the constant fear, flashbacks, night terrors, and anxiety. Consequently, I was arrested for underage drinking and spent a year on probation labeled a criminal despite having the actual experience of being a rape victim without access to the appropriate resources to recover. I was filled with shame, self-hatred, and self-doubt and believed that what had been done to me was my fault. Walking past my rapist on campus to get to class and wondering if the other students he surrounded himself with could be the other individuals who also raped me became too big a burden to carry and I eventually left my university.

I never reported the gang rape to campus officials because I was unaware that a process existed to do so. Despite there being existing Title IX guidance in place, in 2004 the Institution of Higher Education that I attended had not begun to implement the guidance policies. There were no Title IX talks at freshman orientation. There was no equity office or confidential advocates to talk to. There was no information about rights or reasonable accommodations or remedies. Instead, my college experience (and I imagine the experience of many others) can be best described as suffering in silence with no path to help, hope, or healing. Your “yes,” vote today on SB19-007 would change that for future students enrolled at a Colorado Institution of Higher Education as SB19-007 would require awareness and prevention training annually to all incoming students and newly employed faculty and staff.

I share this story from my personal experience to give example to the types of students who will be failed by the new Title IX rule that the U.S. Dept. of Education is proposing, specifically the provision that will remove schools requirements to investigate assaults that occur in off-campus settings - this is THE REASON why the passage of SB19-007 is so critically important to our state. The fraternity house that I was gang raped at was an off-campus setting. If the Department chooses to limit a schools ability to support victims based on the location of their assault, it is literally choosing to turn back the clock of progress to a time where what happened to me will continue to happen to others. By denying protections to victims of off-campus assaults, the Department is choosing to play a central role in perpetuating the exact violence that I described above – an institutional commitment to turning a blind eye.

Today, Members, you have a chance to do the right thing and charter a different course in Colorado. SB19-007 creates an Advisory Committee for Institutions, Title IX Coordinators, Attorneys, and Victim Advocates to work together to respond to this reckless and irresponsible policy handed down to states from the Department so that we can continue this vital work of creating a “Colorado solution” to outline how our states’ Institutions will not fail students but instead continue to address off-campus sexual misconduct.

I’d like to share with you, too, that despite not receiving adequate support immediately following my campus sexual assault, I eventually found a path to healing. Aided by the support of an exceptional team of people, including: professors, probation officers, therapists, professional mentors, family, and friends - I no longer believe that what happened to me was my fault. Those feelings of shame, self-hatred, and self-doubt have been replaced with the intrinsic belief that I am a person of self-worth, self-value, self-respect, and deserving of love. I went back to school and received a Master’s degree with honors; I am gainfully employed in a field I am honored to be a part of; my body has healed and I am nearly 11-years sober; and today, I can assert with surety that I truly live a life beyond my wildest dreams here in Colorado. I no longer experience constant fear, flashbacks, night terrors, and anxiety - I survived my sexual assault. I, like all the survivors sitting in this chamber, and listening in the Gallery or online - am the profile of strength, resilience, and hope.

I’ll end with saying, students deserve safe access to meaningful education. Regrettably, the Title IX proposed rule changes fall far short of this ideal but today, Members, you have the opportunity to pass meaningful legislation to support Institutions and students and I hope that you will vote “yes” on SB19-007 to do exactly that.

Thank you Representative Buckner and Representative McLachlan for carrying this bill. Thank you members of the House Education Committee for your bipartisan support of SB19-007, unanimously passing the bill out of committee yesterday. And thank you, Members, for listening to my story of survivorship - this is the first time it’s ever been shared publicly.

With warm regards,

An anonymous survivor and alumna of the University of Colorado