



MEMO OF SUPPORT

DATE: November 18, 2025
TO: The Honorable Kathy Hochul Governor of New York State
CC: Brian Mahanna, Kathryn Garcia, Emily Kadar, Sabrina Bierer
FROM: Jeri Powell, President, New York Junior League

SUBJECT: Speak Your Truth (SYT) Act (S2419/A687)

The State Advocates for Public Policy Committee (SAPP) of the New York Junior League (NYJL) is proud to work with The New York State Public Affairs Committee (NYSPAC), and a coalition of national and local organizations to advocate for the passage of the proposed Speak Your Truth (SYT) Act (S2419/A687) to protect survivors of sexual assault from baseless defamation lawsuits while still allowing false accusations to be challenged with clear and convincing evidence.

This effort, sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal and Assembly Member Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, would amend the civil rights law to deem certain survivor communications made without malice as privileged.

This change is vital to ensuring that survivors of sexual assault, discrimination or harassment are able to seek justice. Nearly one in three workplace harassment survivors never report due to fear of retaliation. Survivors often stay silent out of fear of defamation lawsuits. This fear not only discourages them from reporting the assault, but also shields perpetrators.

The Speak Your Truth Act reflects NYJL, NYSPAC and the Junior League's values of advancing women's rights and access to justice within New York state. In addition to deeming certain survivor communications made without malice as privileged, SYT would also allow prevailing defendants in defamation cases to recover attorney's fees and costs. By protecting survivors from these legal threats, this bill ensures they can safely share their experiences without the risk of financial ruin, breaking the cycle of silence that enables harmful behavior to persist.

- High-profile cases show a disturbing trend—Dr. Luke's lawsuit against Kesha, defamation claims against Bill Cosby's accusers, and Taylor Swift's countersuit victory highlight the growing weaponization of defamation suits against survivors. While celebrities can fight back, many survivors can't.

- The malice standard—knowingly making false statements or acting with reckless disregard for the truth—protects survivors from baseless defamation lawsuits while still allowing false accusations to be challenged with clear and convincing evidence.
- False reports of sexual assault are rare (2-10% of all reports), while **over 60% of assaults go unreported**. Protecting survivors should not be overshadowed by misconceptions about false accusations.
- Momentum is growing nationwide, with Connecticut, Oregon, Maine and California passing similar bills, and at least 15 states and the UK Parliament introducing similar legislation.

For nearly 125 years, the New York Junior League has advocated for issues affecting women, children, families and underserved communities in New York City. On behalf of our members, we strongly urge you to consider supporting SYT to remove barriers for survivors of sexual assault, discrimination or harassment seeking justice.

About the New York Junior League (NYJL)

- Established in 1901, the New York Junior League (“NYJL”) is one of the oldest and largest women’s non-profit volunteer organizations in New York City. We have more than 2,500 volunteers — of all races, religions, and ethnicities – who donate more than 100,000 hours of service every year. We train volunteers to develop skills for community work, to serve on boards, and to be leaders.
- Our legislative focus areas for 2025-2026 are domestic violence, women’s health and equality, mental health equity, and poverty relief.
- Our members are constituents of New York City and the surrounding areas.

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