



Sept. 18, 2018

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of California
c/o Camille Wagner, Legislative Affairs Secretary
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

I am writing to express my strong support for AB 2338, the Talent Protections Act sponsored by Assembly Member Marc Levine, which is much needed legislation representing a truly watershed opportunity to change the face and shape of the fashion industry by protecting the health and safety of models.

While modeling appears from the outside to be a glamorous profession, fashion models face serious occupational hazards that put their health and safety in jeopardy. A majority of models begin work as young teens, often between the ages of 13 and 16 years old, and usually end their careers when they have barely reached adulthood, typically in their late teens or early 20s. Most models, especially those working as runway or fit models, are extremely thin, even underweight. However, they are frequently pressured by their employers to lose more weight, and models can even face dismissal from jobs if they are unable to do so. Kristie Clements, a former *Vogue* editor, once said, "The ideal body shape used as a starting point for a collection [is] a female on the brink of hospitalization from starvation."

When employment for these girls and young women, and also boys and young men, is contingent on being dangerously thin, the consequences for their health can be perilous, long lasting, and even life threatening. Three European studies of women working as professional fashion models, compared to other women, found elevated rates of serious symptoms of eating disorders and body mass indexes so low as to be medically concerning for potential signs of starvation. Research has also found that the longer a girl or young woman works as a model, the more likely she is to develop a severely distorted psychological drive to pursue thinness to unhealthy extremes.

In addition, professional models have higher rates of anorexia nervosa diagnoses compared to others who are not models. Anorexia is a devastating illness that can lead to infertility, permanent damage to the heart, organ failure, and even death. Anorexia has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness, more than substance use, schizophrenia, or even depression. Adolescents with anorexia have ten times the risk of dying compared to peers their age without the disorder. Simply put, whether or not a model develops a full-blown eating disorder, these girls, boys, and young women and men are working under conditions that essentially amount to coerced starvation.

As the majority of models begin working professionally as minors, they are also at heightened risk for sexual exploitation by unscrupulous adults who prey on vulnerable children and youth.

Sadly, this kind of harassment within the modeling industry is so pervasive it is too often treated as just part of the job. In a U.S. survey of professional models conducted by the Model Alliance, nearly 40% of models reported being pressured to have sex with someone at work, and countless models have come forward to report experiences of rape, harassment, and sexual exploitation at the hands of fashion designers, photographers, agents, and even executives in the industry, often at meetings arranged by their agencies.

In addition to sexual exploitation, models also often face economic exploitation. Models are frequently paid in clothing or photos or are not paid at all. They are often not informed how much they can expect to be paid for jobs, and much of the work models do, such as castings and fittings, is unpaid. As a result, very few models make the high salaries assumed to come with the modeling profession and many actually live in debt to their agencies.

We refuse to stand by silent any longer as these abuses against fashion models continue unabated. With AB 2338, California can start to make important changes in the fashion industry. This bill will require training for employees and models on sexual harassment and where to report improper treatment when it occurs. The bill also requires education on nutrition and eating disorders for adult models so that they and their peers can be more aware of the signs and symptoms and know where to turn for help if needed.

With AB 2338, California will join a growing global movement -- a movement that includes France, Israel, Milan, Madrid, and more -- where governments and citizens have made the moral choice to stand up for girls, boys, and young women and men and stand beside models to demand that they be treated fairly and humanely by their employers and that their health and safety be protected. The time has come to guarantee the safe and healthy working conditions that all models deserve. Your leadership in the state in protecting the health and rights of workers is widely recognized and respected. I urge you now to extend your support for workers' rights to professional models by signing this urgently needed legislation into California law.

With respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Bryn Austin', written in a cursive style.

S. Bryn Austin, ScD

Director, Harvard Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders

Professor of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School

Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health