



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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The Honorable Alice Peisch
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The Honorable Jason Lewis
Chair, Joint Committee on Education
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May 20, 2021, via email

Dear Chairs Peisch and Lewis,

I write to offer testimony in strong support for H.673/S.318, *An Act relative to healthy youth*. As you know this legislation would require school districts that offer sex education to provide medically accurate, age-appropriate, comprehensive information with a focus on building healthy relationships and an understanding of consent and boundaries. Curricula would also be inclusive of LGBTQ youth sexual health.

Comprehensive sex ed that teaches about healthy relationships and consent is key to reducing and preventing sexual assault and harassment and fostering positive health outcomes. In short, ending the epidemic of sexual violence starts in part with education. Including LGBTQ youth in sex ed curriculum reduces isolation and barriers that contribute to higher risk of sexual violence. Cultivating open conversations about sexual health and consent can increase the likelihood of youth survivors reaching out for support.

The consequences of outdated curricula are not limited to sexual assault. Students face serious long-term health repercussions when they are not taught the full range of sex education. Although they represent only a quarter of people having sex, more than two-thirds of chlamydia cases and almost half of gonorrhea cases occurred among young people ages 15 to 24 recently in Massachusetts. Many young people are not receiving the tools they need to prevent STIs — just 52 percent of Massachusetts teens were taught how to use condoms in school that same year. This is frankly outrageous and completely preventable with the right school resources.

In previous sessions, certain voices in the education community were hesitant to add new curricula to overburdened and under resourced districts. But thanks to the leadership of this Committee, Massachusetts has updated its funding formula to be the most equitable in the country thereby addressing previous concerns. While this bill is an incomplete solution — as I believe every single district ought to teach comprehensive sex ed — requiring existing sex-ed districts to update their standards is an important first step.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony in support of the Healthy Youth Act. I respectfully urge the Committee to report this bill out favorably so we can vote for it this summer.

Yours in service,

Mike Connolly