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Advancing  
Women's RightsCONNECTICUT  
WOMEN'S  
EDUCATION  
AND  
LEGAL FUND**Education Committee***House Bill No. 5591 An Act Concerning Healthy Teens**Submitted by Amy Miller, Program and Public Policy Director, Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund*

February 29, 2008

Good afternoon. My name is Amy Miller and I am the Program and Public Policy Director at the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. I am here today talk about *House Bill 5591 An Act Concerning Healthy Teens*. While we appreciate that this bill addresses health issues for teens, we are concerned that this bill does not go far enough. The bill should explicitly include the sexual health of our youth.

CWEALF strongly believes that Connecticut teens should be provided with medically accurate, age-appropriate comprehensive sex education at school in order to prevent teen-age pregnancies and to prevent the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV. Studies have shown that teen-agers who receive comprehensive sex education, which both addresses contraceptive information and abstinence, are more likely than those who receive abstinence-only messages to delay sexual initiation and to use contraception when they do become sexually active.

Currently, Connecticut does not require schools to teach sex education and has no dedicated funding for comprehensive programs that work. This is a serious problem, and it should come as no surprise that Connecticut has not escaped the serious problems associated with irresponsible teen-age sexual activities. Localities such as Hartford, New Britain, and Bridgeport report teen birth rates of between 13% and 20%. Young people under 24 accounted for the majority of Chlamydia and Gonorrhea reported in 2006 in Connecticut.

Numbers on a national level are similarly startling. Two-thirds of young people become sexually active by graduation and the teen birthrate in the United States jumped 3% from 2005 to 2006 after more than 15 years of steady decline, resulting in about 900,000 teen pregnancies in the U.S. per year. Further, there is a high incidence of HIV among young people under the age of 25, and teens acquire more than 4 million sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) each year. Teen-agers in the U.S. have higher rates of unwanted pregnancy and STDs than their counterparts in Europe where comprehensive sex education is the norm.

It is ironic that comprehensive sex education is more likely to keep teens abstinent than abstinence-only programs. Such abstinence-only programs also can create a hostile environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. Many curricula only mention LGBT people and same-sexual activity in reference

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only to promiscuity or disease. They lead students with LGBT parents to think that their families don't count and are responsible for society's problems. Further, studies have shown that LGBT youth who receive LGBT-sensitive HIV instruction in school tend to engage in risky sexual behavior less frequently. As a state which has often been proactive in our efforts to protect our LGBT families, adopting abstinence-only programs is in direct contradiction of that progress.

For these and many other reasons I urge you to amend and then pass House Bill 5591 once it includes comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education for youth.