



Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: *CT Catholic Conference*

Date: *2/29/08* Bill Number: *5591*

CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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Testimony in Opposition to
H.B. 5591 "An Act Concerning Healthy Teens"
Before the Committee on Education
February 29, 2008

The Connecticut Catholic Conference, the public policy office of Connecticut's Catholic Bishops, would like to urge the members of the Education Committee to vote against H.B. 5591 "An Act Concerning Healthy Teens".

The underlying goal of H.B. 5591, to reduce teen pregnancy and stem the epidemic rate of growth of STD's among teens, is laudable and supported by the Catholic Conference. Risky sexual behavior among teens must be curtailed. Where the Conference primarily disagrees with the proponents of this legislation is how to deliver that message, and what that primary message should be. The proponents of the bill appear to stress instructions on the mechanics of sexual activity through a method called "comprehensive sex education". The Conference supports programs that focus on a method called "abstinence education". The pro's and con's on these different approaches, although critical to achieving the goal of this legislation, is not my primary reason for appearing before you today.

The Conference's review of this legislation appears to raise many more critical and significant questions than it answers. Questions which are outside of the comprehensive versus abstinence education debate usually surround such legislation.

First, a claim and major assumption behind this bill is that teens are not being taught sexuality education within our public schools. Where is the evidence for this claim? The mere fact that teen pregnancies are occurring and the rate of STD's among teens (note: the rate among adults is also increasing) does not mean sexuality education is not taking place. For years the State Department of Education has provided curriculum guidelines on teen health to local school districts. These guidelines were most recently revised in 2006 and include both abstinence and comprehensive sex education. How many districts are currently reviewing or planning to implement these new guidelines? Before the legislature allocates \$1 million dollars in state funding to enhance sexuality education, it

would be in your best interest to confirm what is actually happening within our school districts and not just assume the comments made by the proponents of this bill, some of whom may benefit financially under this legislation, are in fact accurate.

Second, for what purpose are the funds to be used? Will the funds be used to assist local school districts in curriculum development? Local school districts constantly perform curriculum reviews within their operating budgets. Why is extra funding needed if curriculum review is already a year-to-year budget item in most school districts? Will the funds be used by school districts to hire outside businesses, such as Planned Parenthood, who is the primary supporter and organizer behind this legislation, to teach courses on sexuality? In this case no long term curricular changes take place, the district becomes dependent on outside providers, and the local board of education may end up with weaker control and oversight of the curriculum.

Finally, why are the funds directed only to schools that have an already “demonstrated” record on teaching teen sexuality? It would appear to make more sense to focus new funding on districts that have not been providing teen sexuality education.

Due to the questions raised above, as well as additional concerns I am unable to address in the time allotted, and the multitude of other educational needs that must be addressed within our state, the Catholic Conference urges this committee not to support H.B. 5591.

Deacon David Reynolds
Legislative Liaison