



Public Hearing Testimony

Speaker:

Elizabeth B.
Ritter

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State of Connecticut

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Testimony
Committee on Education
February 29, 2008

In Support of HB 5591 AN ACT CONCERNING HEALTHY TEENS

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Committee on Education. I am Elizabeth Ritter and I am the State Representative from the 38th District. I am here to urge your support of HB 5591 AN ACT CONCERNING HEALTHY TEENS.

I am pleased the committee has chosen to raise this bill. Over the past years it has become increasingly evident that fewer Connecticut students get information about sexual health before they become sexually active. Our existing state law does require that the public schools teach health and safety that includes "human growth and development" and "disease prevention", and the State Board of Education is required to develop curriculum guides to help schools develop family life programs. Parents can opt their children out of any family life programs at any time. This bill does not change any of these provisions.

Most of these programs are high school programs, usually in the early high school years. The bill presents an opportunity to offer support, via a competitive grant process, to local and regional board of education with a demonstrated success in providing health education for teenagers. It is my hope this will involve community-based organizations with such a demonstrated success. Often community resources and experience speak strongly to our teens about these matters and often it can be done outside the regular school schedule and in a manner that provides education to their parents on providing sexuality education to their children. My concern really is to reach as many teens as possible with age-appropriate, comprehensive, medically accurate information – preferably before they need it.

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Sadly, the statistics we see from our Department of Public Health indicate a persistent increase in sexually transmitted disease, teen pregnancy, and HIV infection of our young people through unprotected sex. None of these are not outcomes teens are seeking – in fact, they are very interested in avoiding them. Our tool, as policy-makers, is education at the family, school, and community organization levels. But that education has to be age-appropriate, comprehensive, and medically accurate in order to be credible and acceptable to the average teen. This bill presents an opportunity to provide it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.