

Date: **2/9/08** Bill Number: **RHB 5591**

My name is Judy Singer and I would like to submit testimony regarding Raised Bill 5591, An Act Concerning Healthy Teens, on behalf of the 900 members of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) of Connecticut.

The National Council of Jewish Women of Connecticut joined the Healthy Teens Coalition in order to promote real sexuality education in Connecticut's public schools. Last spring, NCJW launched a national campaign called **Plan A**, which cites the importance of medically accurate sexuality education. The National Council of Jewish Women believes that in order to make responsible, healthy decisions, young people need, and society has a moral obligation to provide, medically accurate, age-appropriate information about sex and sexuality. Comprehensive sexuality education teaches that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, but also provides accurate information about contraceptive options so that individuals can make informed life decisions. With that in mind, I urge this committee to revisit the language of this bill to specify that the healthy teens education grant program will be used for medically accurate, age-appropriate sexuality education.

Comprehensive programs about sexuality are effective. These programs have demonstrated effectiveness in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners and increasing contraception and condom use. This is not a time to be squeamish about imparting accurate information because it has been proven that this education can and does save lives¹.

The Connecticut Legislature, which has shown leadership on so many critical issues, must acknowledge the seriousness of recent statistics which show increasing rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections in our state. Do we have the will to pass legislation which will provide our youth with the knowledge that they need to avoid these outcomes?

Recent polling shows that most adults support a comprehensive approach to sexuality education - one that provides information about abstinence and contraception. Seventy-eight percent of those polled favor allowing public schools to provide students with birth control information. On February 26, 2008, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs²,

¹ Effective programs include material that is age appropriate and medically accurate, does not teach or promote religion, teaches that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, provides comprehensive information about health benefits and side effects of all contraceptive methods as they relate to both pregnancy and risk reduction for STDs and HIV/AIDS, encourages family communication about sexuality, teaches interpersonal negotiation skills for young people and teaches young people how alcohol and drug use can affect decision-making.

² The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) serves as the representative voice of the organized American Jewish community in addressing the mandate of the Jewish community relations field. The mandate is expressed in two, interrelated goals:

1. to safeguard the rights of Jews here, in Israel, and around the world; and, in order to accomplish that,
2. to protect, preserve, and promote a just American society, one that is democratic and pluralistic.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education

In too many schools, students receive incomplete, medically inaccurate sexuality education that often imposes one particular religious viewpoint about sex on all students regardless of their individual religious traditions. In order to make responsible, healthy decisions, young people need—and society has a moral obligation to provide—medically accurate, age-appropriate information about sex and sexuality. Comprehensive sexuality education teaches that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), but also provides accurate information about contraceptive options so that individuals can make informed life decisions. A small minority must not be allowed to impose its religious beliefs about sexuality education upon all Americans.

Comprehensive programs about sexuality are effective.

These programs have demonstrated effectiveness in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners, and increasing contraception and condom use.¹

Most Americans support comprehensive sexuality education.

Recent polling shows that most adults support a comprehensive approach to sexuality education—one that provides information about abstinence and contraception. Seventy-eight percent of those polled favor allowing public schools to provide students with birth control information.²

Abstinence-only programs do not work and are dangerous.

According to a report commissioned by Congress and released in April 2007, abstinence-only programs, specifically those funded by Title V Section 510(b) of the Social Security Act, do not have statistically significant impacts on the rate of sexual abstinence, the number of sexual partners, or the age at which sexually experienced youth first engaged in sexual intercourse.

In addition to being ineffective, abstinence-only programs ignore the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students, sexually active students, and students who are or have been the victims of sexual violence.³

A comprehensive sexuality education program includes material that:

- ▶ Is age-appropriate and medically accurate.
- ▶ Does not teach or promote religion.
- ▶ Teaches that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy or STIs.
- ▶ Stresses the value of abstinence without ignoring those young people who are or have been sexually active.
- ▶ Provides comprehensive information about the health benefits and side effects of all contraceptives and barrier methods as they relate to both pregnancy prevention and risk reduction for STIs, including HIV/AIDS.
- ▶ Encourages family communication about sexuality.
- ▶ Teaches negotiation skills for young people.
- ▶ Teaches young people how alcohol and drug use can affect responsible decision-making.⁴

¹Fact Sheet: *The Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act*, Washington, DC: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US, 2007.

²*Abortion and Rights of Terror Suspects Top Court Issues*, Washington, DC: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press/Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2005.

³Christopher Trenholm, *Impacts of Four Title V Section 510, Abstinence Education Programs*, New Jersey: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 2007.

⁴Fact Sheet: *The Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act*, Washington, DC: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US, 2007.